

**THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF
AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR
OF 1914-1918**

**VOLUME VII
SINAI AND PALESTINE**

THE
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE
IN SINAI AND PALESTINE

1914-1918

BY
H. S. GULLETT

With 77 maps and 83 illustrations

Tenth Edition

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PREFACE

THE sole purpose of this narrative is to record the work of the Australian Light Horse in the British campaigns in Sinai, Palestine and Syria during the years 1916, 1917, and 1918. It is in no sense a complete narrative of those campaigns.

Obviously, however, it was impracticable to set out the part played by the Australians, who were only a portion of the mounted troops employed, without dealing (in broad outline at least) with the operations of the British Army as a whole. To make the activities of the Light Horse intelligible, it has been necessary to describe the strategy and tactics employed for the whole force, and at times even to give accounts of engagements in which the Australians were not directly involved.

The story, therefore, in its bolder features covers the whole British force. But, as will be apparent, it covers in detail only the fighting and the campaign life of the Australians. To readers beyond the Commonwealth this may suggest a biased sense of relative values. There is no such bias. The author is fully aware that the Light Horse achievements, although high in quality and sometimes decisive in effect, were but a contributing factor. The detailed history of the force of infantry and cavalry from the United Kingdom, from India, and from other countries within and without the Empire, has yet to be written.

Grateful acknowledgment is due of the author's debt to many hundreds of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Australian Imperial Force who served in the campaign, for the assistance they rendered in the collection of information for this volume. Unfortunately most of the diaries of the units engaged were, until 1918, at best very scantily written. In the collection of material the author has had access to the original official papers used in the field, so far as they have been preserved. From the beginning of December 1917 he accompanied the Light Horse in nearly all their operations. But in dealing with the earlier stages

of the campaign he has been dependent for detail upon a systematic interviewing of responsible officers, and a minute examination—under the guidance of officers who took part in the fighting—of the ground of each engagement; personal narratives were obtained from a great majority of Light Horse leaders of all ranks; and by the careful comparing of all these statements, and the checking of them with the official papers, the story has been built up. Acknowledgment is due also to many Imperial officers who gave valuable assistance, and to Mr. Winston Churchill, who, as Secretary of State for War, permitted the author to study not only all the original records of Army Headquarters during the commands of General Murray and General Allenby, but also the papers of all British units engaged. But for this courtesy the volume could not have been written.

In particular the author expresses his indebtedness to Mr. Alan S. Murray,¹ who has been responsible for the making of all the maps and the small inset sketches, with Mr. W. S. Perry² working keenly and capably as his assistant. Mr. Murray, although a member of the A.I.F., served in the campaign with the survey corps working under British G.H.Q. During the campaign his work in surveying No-Mans' Land, often under fire, was recognised by high award. He afterwards made a detailed survey of all the Australian battle-grounds; and, in addition to the assistance afforded by his maps, his intimate knowledge of the country was of great aid to the author.

To Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Browne, and to Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Foster, the author tenders his thanks for permission to use a number of sketches made by them during operations in the field.

H. S. G.

MELBOURNE,

1st November, 1922.

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CHRONOLOGY FROM END OF 1915 TO 1918

(*Italic type indicates events dealt with in this volume.*)

1915.
 Oct. 5—Salonica campaign begins.
 Dec. 20—Evacuation of Anzac and Suvla.
1916.
 Jan. 8—Evacuation of Helles.
 Feb. 21—Battle of Verdun opens.
 March 15—*Despatch of Australian infantry to France begins.*
 April 29—Surrender of General Townshend at Kut (Mesopotamia).
 May 31—Battle of Jutland.
 June 4-Aug. 11—Russian offensive (under Brusilov) in Galicia.
 June 8—Compulsory enlistment in Great Britain begins.
 July 1—Opening of First Battle of the Somme.
 " 19—5th Australian Division engaged in Flanders at Fromelles
 " 22—I Anzac Corps in Battle of Pozières.
 Aug. 4—*Battle of Romani.*
 " 27—Roumania enters the war.
 Oct. 4-Dec. 23—Austro-German counter-offensive in Roumania.
 Dec. 7—Mr. Lloyd George succeeds Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister.
1917.
 Feb. 1—Germans commence "unrestricted submarine warfare."
 " 21—Germans in France begin withdrawal to "Hindenburg Line."
 March 9—Revolution in Russia.
 " 11—Baghdad captured by the British.
 " 26—*First Battle of Gaza.*
 April 6—United States enters the war.
 " 9—British offensive at Arras (I Anzac Corps engaged at Bullecourt, April 11, May 3, *et seq.*).
 " 19—*Second Battle of Gaza.*
 May 4—French offensive near Soissons.
 " 5—Russians falling back in Mesopotamia, Persia, and Armenia.
 " 12—Italian offensive on Isonzo-Carso front.
 June 7—British offensive at Messines (II Anzac Corps engaged).
 " 27—*Allenby arrives in Egypt.*
 July 1—Russian offensive in Galicia (under Brusilov).
 " 19—German counter-offensive in Galicia, leading to defeat of Russians.
 " 31—British and French offensive in Flanders (Third Battle of Ypres: I and II Anzac Corps engaged, September-November).
 Aug. 19—Italian offensive on Isonzo-Carso front.
 " 21—Germans attack the Russian front near Riga.
 Oct. 24—Austro-German offensive breaks Italian line at Caporetto.
 Nov. 7—*Third Battle of Gaza.*
 " 20—British offensive towards Cambrai.
 Dec. 2—Preliminary negotiations for armistice between Germany and Russia.
 " 6—Roumania suspends hostilities.
 " 9—*Capture of Jerusalem.*

1918.

- March 3—Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed.
 " 9—British advance along the Tigris.
 " 21—Final German offensive opens near Somme (Australian Corps engaged from March 27).
 April 9—Battle of the Lys begins (1st Australian Division engaged from April 13).
 May 27—German offensive against the French on the Aisne.
 June 15—Austrian offensive against Italians on Piave repulsed.
 " 16—Bulgarian support of Germany weakens.
 July 15—German thrust towards Paris across the Marne.
 " 18—Franco-American counter-attack north of the Marne.
 Aug. 8—British and French attack from Amiens (Australian Corps engaged).
 Sept. 19—*General Allenby's offensive in Palestine.*
 " 28—Bulgaria asks for an armistice.
 " 29—Final breaking of the Hindenburg Line.
 " 30—*Capture of Damascus.*
 Oct. 4—Germany seeks an armistice through U.S.A.
 " 30—*Armistice signed by Turkey.*
 Nov. 4—British and French advance beyond Scheldt Americans reach Meuse
 " 11—Armistice with Germany signed.

CHAPTER I

THE TURKS INVADE EGYPT

WHEN, in the closing days of December, 1915, the news of the British evacuation of Gallipoli reached Constantinople, the populace was stirred to almost fanatical rejoicing. Even the members of the Government, if Government that strange collection of adventurers and assassins could be called, joined in the excited tumult. Talaat, Minister of the Interior, and Enver Pasha, Minister for War, the dominating figures of the Young Turk Committee, saw in the British failure at the Dardanelles a promise that their widest and dearest ambition would be realised. "Turkey has defeated the British Navy!" Enver had cried nearly a year before, when the attack from the sea upon the forts of the straits had failed so disastrously; "we have done what Germany could not do." In compelling the evacuation of Anzac, Helles, and Suvla the Turks had, to the minds of that crude company of mushroom autocrats, achieved a still more momentous victory over the arms of Britain. For eight months Constantinople had lived in a nightmare of uncertainty and actual fear. Enver had loudly boasted that the British Navy could never force the Dardanelles, and that the men of Anzac could not break through the cordon which bound them and win their way across the rugged Peninsula. But while these boasts were on his lips, he and his colleagues, like their friend and ally Wangenheim, the German Ambassador, daily expected the fall of the Turkish defences and the appearance of the British fleet before Constantinople. Had Gallipoli been captured, the reign of the Young Turk Committee would have come instantly to an end.

The evacuation of the Peninsula not only gave prolonged life to the Young Turk administration; it removed the last obstacle to the fulfilment of a purpose to which the Young Turks had committed themselves before the war. Even before 1914 the new rulers of Turkey had disappointed and shocked all civilisation. Countries which enjoyed constitutional government and religious freedom had hailed with delight and applause the brave and practical band of Turkish

reformers who in 1909 had swept down from the Macedonian hills, seized the bloody Abdul Hamid, taken control of the Government, and declared for a new and enlightened Turkey. Men of all races had rejoiced to read that Moslems and Christians were publicly embracing in the streets and worshipping in each others' holy places. Under the rule of the Young Turks all men in the Empire were to rank as equals. All disabilities affecting Christians were to be removed; the world was no longer to be outraged by the grim story of Armenian massacres. Jews and Armenians were to bear arms for their Sultan, and actually did so in the Balkan and the Italian wars.

But the new paradise was of fleeting duration. Soon there came news of a highly organised and efficient Young Turk policy, which in its calculated bloodiness and cruelty, and its far-reaching thoroughness, overshadowed the worst horrors of the Sultans. Persecutions and massacres of the Christians under Abdul Hamid, even at their worst, were an intermittent horror inflicted by an absolute monarch, luxurious and sensual, and by his ministers and officials. His aim may have been extermination; but his actions were halting and spasmodic, and were interrupted and at times frustrated by the pressure of England and other Christian democracies.

The declared policy of the Young Turks was far more ambitious, deliberate, and menacing. It aimed at nothing less than absolutely purging the Empire of every individual who was not a Turk. The race in future was to be a pure Turkish race, speaking and writing only the Turkish language, and worshipping only according to the Moslem faith. The alien millions of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, who represented most of the brains, the business capacity, and the industry of the country, were to be killed off or driven out. This monstrous conception was the more amazing because of its origin. It came from men who were still being applauded as inspired and heroic reformers. It did not have its birth in religious fanaticism or in old ingrained caste prejudice. Talaat, Enver, and Djemal, Minister for Marine, the three ringleaders in the hideous project, who fairly reflected the personnel and spirit of the Young Turk Committee, were neither religious fanatics nor parochial and

bigoted Turks. All three were men of humble beginnings, who had made their own way in the world; none of them appears to have been a devout practising Moslem; big, roystering Talaat certainly was not.

These three Young Turk leaders were apparently prompted by nothing more than insensate personal ambition. The devilish inspiration came perhaps from Enver, whose vanity, naturally excessive, had been fostered and heightened by his contact with Western Europe. In the military schools at Berlin, where he spent some time in study, he was humoured and flattered by the Kaiser and the Kaiser's friends. There the polished young Ottoman, his envy excited by the majesty of German and British power, conceived the project of organising and, within his own lifetime, uplifting the squalid, heterogeneous Turkish Empire into a mighty nation in the Near East, one in blood and religion, and a rival in strength and influence to the dominant Powers of the West.

Fiery man of action as Enver on occasion could be, he was a sleek and courteous diplomatist with remarkable self-control; shrewd, reserved, and calculating. He fully realised, as did Talaat, that the Germans sought to use Turkey solely for their own ends; but in his overreaching vanity he matched his wits against the Kaiser's ministers and diplomats. He would allow Germany to regard him as her plaything and tool just so long as that policy assisted in the fulfilment of his ambitions; when the time came he would cast her aside. German organisation and German munitions saved Turkey when the Allies strove to force the Dardanelles; the German Ambassador, Wangenheim, and the Government at Berlin accorded a sympathetic toleration to the massacres of 1915 and 1916, when upwards of a million Armenian Christians suffered death with every form of outrage. So, while by her intervention in the war Turkey assisted Germany, closing the Bosphorus and isolating Russia from France and England, and keeping large British armies engaged in the Near East far away from the decisive Western Front, Germany on the other hand helped Turkey to revive her shattered military prestige by the successful resistance at Gallipoli, and gave the Young Turks a free hand in the extermination of the Christians of Asia Minor.

Remarkable throughout the war was the wide gulf between the Young Turk leaders and the great mass of the Moslems whom they ruled with a power which, while it seemed so accidental and precarious, was always so controlling and absolute. The grandiose schemes of Enver and Talaat for the rejuvenation of Turkey were not at the outset shared by the Turkish people. Among them up to April, 1915, there was no public enthusiasm for the Germans or the war, for the extermination of the Christians or the re-conquest of Egypt. On the contrary, the great peasant mass of the population, naturally placid and contented, were still bowed down under the grief and excessive taxation brought upon them by the recent wars in the Balkans and Tripoli. To them all foreigners were alike; any preference they may have felt for one or the other of the Western nations was certainly not strong enough to stir in them any enthusiasm for battle. The rule of the Young Turk was to them as the rule of Abdul Hamid. The promised "reforms" had long ceased to excite their lazy minds.

To an observer from Western Europe it might have seemed impossible that the upstart Young Turk Committee at Constantinople could quicken the nation into another great war, such as would demand the conscription of all men of fighting age, the surrender without compensation of all serviceable live stock and vehicles and goods, and the indefinite desertion of homes and holdings. But so strong did the Committee prove, so wide-reaching were its ramifications, and so sure, swift, and deadly its penalties for non-compliance with its orders, that when war was threatened the mobilisation was immediate and effective. Mr. Henry Morgenthau, United States Ambassador at Constantinople from 1913 to 1916, to whose book *Secrets of the Bosphorus* all students of Turkey at the time are deeply indebted, gives a vivid picture of this fateful mobilisation. He describes the motley stream of the polyglot men of Asia Minor trooping into Constantinople, a ragged, dejected, dusty, footsore throng: gentle, shrinking Armenians; frightened, unwarlike Jews; and stolid, obedient Turks. Never was there mobilised a force which in appearance gave less promise of fighting capacity. But earlier in his book Mr. Morgenthau describes the striking transfor-

mation wrought in similar human material before the war by the rigid German system of military training. This non-descript mob from Asia Minor was at once seized by the same relentless and efficient German machine; and very soon they, too, or at least all the Turks among them, were drilled and hammered and moulded into soldiers of sound fighting quality.

The Turkish Army, when it entered upon this war, was an army of hastily-trained recruits, leavened by a rare, if slender, band of Balkan and Tripoli veterans. Such an army, to be successful, needs a high moral motive, like that which impelled the citizen armies of England between 1915 and 1919, or a sheer joy of life, such as might be expected in troops recruited in a generous young democratic country like Australia. The Turk possessed neither of these stimulating influences. But the blow at the heart of his Empire, which Britain struck on the Gallipoli Peninsula, stirred those fires which on occasion never fail to move the Turk to passionate temper, fierce energy, and unselfish sacrifice. The peasant Turk is, underneath his seeming fatalism and placid good humour, a strong patriot and a religious fanatic. Touch him on his patriotism or his religion, and he will fight and endure doggedly any suffering. The British touched him on both when they opened fire on his forts at the Dardanelles, and when they landed at Anzac and Helles. It was then a simple matter for Talaat, Enver, and Djemal to use him effectively for any purpose they might contemplate.

Gallipoli cost Turkey the flower of her army as it was at the outbreak of war. Heavy casualties reduced most of her selected regiments of veteran troops. She had fared badly also against Russia in the Caucasus, where in the winter of 1914-1915 Enver Pasha had seen his offensive army almost destroyed. Turkish losses had been considerable in Mesopotamia. But throughout 1915 the Empire had been vigorously mobilising and feverishly training, and at the time of the evacuation of Gallipoli she possessed large forces, all in a forward state of efficiency, and most of them seasoned campaigners. The successful resistance in Gallipoli and on the Euphrates had flattered the men into the belief that they were able to withstand the soldiers of the great British Empire

Thanks to their German ally, they were more strongly supported by artillery, and were better fed, clothed, and equipped than they had been in any previous campaign. Once committed to the hardships of war, their strong Eastern philosophy gave them a degree of patience unknown in Western armies. If not happy warriors, they were not discontented ones, and they faced with equanimity the prospect of a war of indefinite duration.

The Armenian massacres, and the wholesale evacuation and spoliation of the Greeks of Asia Minor, also enhanced their satisfaction with their lot and with their Government. Consciously or unconsciously, Talaat and Enver in their outrages on the Christians pandered to Turkish mob feelings, though the appeal was made not so much to religious fanaticism or racial prejudices as to the baser desires and passions. The modern Turk is strangely complex. The Australians and the British found him throughout the war a clean and even a chivalrous fighter, and a docile, tractable, unresentful prisoner. But he has another and a sinister side to his character. He is still very primitive; he reverts swiftly to the qualities of his wild marauding forbears of a few centuries ago. Appeal to his baser side, and he will burn, ravish, and mutilate. This appeal the Young Turks made; and the same Turkish soldiery whom the Australians knew as gentlemen fighters, the same men who almost invariably respected the Red Cross, excelled, when turned loose with licence to do their worst upon the unhappy Armenians, in every conceivable act of unchivalry, cowardice, and indescribable violence. The motive is generally set down as religious feeling, and doubtless that played some part. But stronger still is the Turk's latent passion for lust and plunder. The Turkish soldiers revelled in the horrible work because they enjoyed it, because it sated their desires and gave to them and to their race the wealth of the fairest and richest provinces of the Empire. The Armenians and their possessions were systematically fed to the Moslem soldiery as a stimulant. The massacres made the Government popular with the troops, and therein lay one reason why Talaat and Enver organised and encouraged them. Germany needed the active co-operation of Turkey; preaching, in Turkey as in Belgium, that

a declaration of war is a declaration that all laws which ennoble civilisation are suspended, she lifted no hand and raised no voice to save the Christians of Armenia.

Early in 1916, therefore, when the British transports were bearing away from Gallipoli an army which, if it had failed in its mission, had by its dazzling valour won the admiration of the world, the Turkish Government and the great mass of the conscript Turkish Army were enthusiastic for the continuance of the war. They had won at the Dardanelles a decisive negative victory. They had fought to save their capital and their shrines from the despised infidel. The enemy, if not destroyed, had stolen away in the night, his purpose unfulfilled. After a succession of humiliating defeats, which had cost the Ottoman Empire nearly the whole of its wide and wealthy domains in Europe, Turkish arms had won a capital campaign against the combined forces of the all-powerful British Empire and France. Constantinople was safe. A great Turkish army was released for fresh operations, and, as the Young Turk Committee and the soldiers believed, for splendid conquest in other fields. The Empire was richer than ever before in trained men, in arms, in munitions, and in supplies. Little wonder that Talaat and Enver and their associates lost their heads, and saw looming before them the fulfilment of all their schemes.

Nor was the British failure at Gallipoli the only good omen in the Turkish heavens. On all sides the portents were auspicious for them and their masterful German ally. The evacuation of Gallipoli had been the consequence of a diplomatic and military victory of first-rate significance to Turkey and her friends. In September, 1915, Bulgaria had joined the Central Powers and declared war; two months later Serbia had been overrun by enemy armies. These two momentous events had established direct railroad communication between the Central Powers on the one side, and Turkey and the Near East, as far as Mesopotamia and Southern Palestine, on the other. The Turkish armies could now draw, without difficulty or the fear of interruption, upon the vast arsenals and factories of Germany and Austria, and were thus assured of their requirements in weapons, munitions, and equipment. Moreover, Turkey's prospects appeared to be

brightening, both in Transcaucasia and in Mesopotamia. The Russians were, it is true, advancing on Trebizond and Erzerum, but were too heavily engaged in Poland to make decisive headway against the Turks. Enver's forces in Transcaucasia, cheered by the news from Gallipoli and the Balkans, and assured of early reinforcements and improved supplies, were fighting with more confidence and efficiency. The anxiety caused in Constantinople by the rapid advance of British troops along the lower reaches of the Euphrates had subsided as the heavy and steadily increasing difficulties of the invading force became more clearly recognised, and as the strength of the defenders was better appreciated. There was still apprehension lest the British, by making another landing, this time at a point on the long Asia Minor coast-line, might cut the Baghdad railway. But the leaders at Constantinople, while always on the alert against such an enterprise, shrewdly believed that the experience of Gallipoli would restrain British attempts in this direction. Moreover, the fear of a Bulgarian attack which had haunted the Turks early in the war, and had made them keep strong forces available for action in Europe, was now removed.

In the minds of her leaders Turkey had safely survived the crisis of the war. She had been tested in every form of modern fighting. Her soldiers had frozen in the snows and thirsted on the desert. Resisting desperately, she had survived, even triumphed. Her defensive campaign now seemed over. The way was open, and the means were ready at hand, for a vigorous and dashing offensive, promising glorious victories, the swift re-conquest of lost territories, and a splendid revival of the Empire. The evacuation of Gallipoli seemed to the Young Turks not merely the turning-point to victory in the war; it was the turning-point in the chequered history of Turkey.

Germany's adroit diplomatists at Constantinople, and the rulers in Berlin, doubtless smiled at all this Turkish exultation and ambitious castle-building. They knew quite well, as all the outside world knew, why the British had failed in Gallipoli, and why the advance along the Euphrates was slow. They knew that, apart from the brave and obstinate expert Turkish riflemen, the Turkish Army was by Western stan-

dards a very inferior fighting machine. They knew that, without German training, discipline, and staff work, without all the German and Austrian technical services, including transport, signals, machine-guns, and artillery, and without the supplies of arms and munitions ensured by the Central Powers, Turkey must have been crushed in a summary and dramatic manner within a few weeks of her declaration of war. Turkey was, in short, serving in admirable fashion the will of her Berlin master. Already by her intervention she had gained for Germany the isolation of Russia, the adhesion of Bulgaria, the overthrow of Serbia, the continued neutrality of Greece and Roumania, and the diversion of a huge measure of Britain's strength from France and Flanders.

So, while the Young Turks saw in the Evacuation a great Ottoman victory and the dawn of a new and triumphant Turkey, Germany saw only the advancement of her own war aims and imperial interests. While the Young Turks rejoiced and prepared to exploit their successes by turning the defensive into an offensive, Germany, the real ruler of Turkey and the Turks, so pulled the strings as to ensure that the future activities of the Ottoman armies should be dictated by her central strategic scheme.

History presents no more tragic picture of the exploitation of human vanity and folly than this exploitation of the Turks by the Germans. By flattery and fair promises Germany, with fine cynicism and superb diplomacy of the cold and brutal order, had seduced Talaat and Enver into the closest of international friendships, and had then, by the agency of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, dramatically bludgeoned them into a declaration of war. The Young Turk leaders, with their inflated sense of power and importance, had been easy victims, believing that, while Germany was doubtless using them, they in their turn would use Germany and would win on the balance. They felt that, at worst, alliance gave them security in their offices at the head of the State; so long as they did the will of Berlin, they were safe in the prestige and the emoluments of their position. And so Turkey, which had faithfully, if unknowingly, served the German interest throughout 1915, continued to serve the same interest in the offensive campaign upon which she

embarked in Palestine and Sinai in the early months of 1916, and in which she was encouraged and stimulated by her lucky and unexpected stroke of fortune at Kut el Amara.

Germany's policy in relation to Turkey was clear to all, except, apparently, the misguided Turks themselves. In January, 1916, Germany was completing arrangements for the heavy, and, as she hoped, decisive blow at Verdun. She had matured plans and assembled forces for an offensive of unprecedented magnitude and intensity. If successful, the assault on that famous sector of the French line would be followed by a campaign of open fighting, and it was essential that Germany should have the utmost possible advantage in numbers. The growth of Britain's armies on the Western Front must be retarded by all the means in Germany's power. But the evacuation of Gallipoli gave opportunity for an immediate and heavy addition to the British forces in France, and that addition would include not only the famous Australian and New Zealand divisions from Anzac but many divisions of seasoned British infantry.

The transport, therefore, of these troops to France must be prevented, or, if not prevented, delayed as long as possible. England must be menaced in the Near East, and compelled to maintain a large force there. That policy, if successful, would mean far more than the diversion of England's soldiers from France. It would continue to impose a heavy burden on her ocean transport; it would leave open to Germany's increasing force of submarines a great merchant fleet bearing troops and army supplies; it would absorb the activities of numerous warships which would otherwise be available for the blockade in the North Sea and for guarding the trade routes leading into English ports; it would, in short, go far to divide and weaken Britain's resources on sea and land, and to vex and diminish her administrative organisation.

Moreover, with the whole coast-line of Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine, from the Dardanelles to El Arish on the borders of Sinai, open to attack from the sea, it was necessary for the Turks and their allies to maintain a substantial mobile defensive force in those countries. A successful landing, followed by a vigorous thrust inland, might cut the Baghdad railway in the neighbourhood of Alexandretta. Syria and

Palestine are long, narrow countries, with numerous passes through their central backbone of mountains. It was always possible for a British force, striking rapidly from the coast, to cut Syria or Palestine in halves, sever the Palestine and Hejaz railways, and isolate and at one blow strip from Turkey all the country to the south, including Arabia. Apart, then, from any strategic demonstration against the Suez Canal and Egypt, or an actual attempt at conquest in that direction, the Turks must of necessity send strong forces towards Sinai.

In seeking motives for the Turkish advance across Sinai in 1916, which led to the war in Palestine and Syria, consideration must also be given to Germany's widespread political activities among the Moslems of the British Empire. German propaganda among the peoples of Egypt and India had been insistent. Berlin never ceased to hope for native risings which would embarrass and weaken Britain's war effort in France. German gold, lavishly outpoured, had nourished the widely-scattered seeds of sedition. Specious promises of military assistance had been made. Early in 1916 Egypt teemed with British soldiers; and even to the German mind, so strangely ill-informed on matters of this kind, the possibilities of a serious Egyptian rising must have appeared remote. But the Germans were still justified in the belief that it was sound policy to march Moslems of Turkey professedly to the relief and liberation of the Moslems of Egypt. Such a campaign at that time might reasonably have been expected to trouble England in her delicate task of administering Egypt, besides hampering her in India and serving German interests in such regions as Arabia and Afghanistan.

But the rulers at Berlin could have had no belief in the success of an advance upon Egypt in 1916. The best they could hope was that a considerable force might obtain a temporary footing on the banks of the Suez Canal and, before it was beaten off, inflict on that vital waterway damage which it would take Britain a long time to repair. That was a perfectly sound military enterprise; coupled with all the other considerations—the desirability of giving employment to the garrisons of Syria and Palestine, the diversion of British reinforcements from France, and the policy of playing upon Moslem feelings—it was a tribute to the vision of the

German General Staff. Our narrow, hard-fought victory at Romani was ample justification for the enemy's enterprise.

The importance of the Suez Canal to Britain's effective conduct of the war was as obvious to Berlin as it was to Whitehall. The advantage which England enjoyed in sea power was dependent upon her ships having access to the shortest sea routes. It is true that the restrictions imposed by the presence of enemy submarines upon traffic through the Mediterranean diminished the importance of the Canal. Still, during every day in the long struggle this precious lane of water, so narrow that two liners cannot steam upon it abreast, was ploughed by deep-sea shipping. Its naval significance, too, was immense. Had Germany, by the agency of her obedient Turkish tool, succeeded in blocking the Canal, the disaster to England would have been equal to the loss of a number of army corps. And the Canal once reached, its traffic was easy of prolonged dislocation. A few well-placed mines and the sinking of a number of steamers would have thrown it out of use for several months. In all the fighting in the Near East military and political considerations were inseparable; and the news of the cutting of the Canal would have had a profound effect, adverse to England, throughout the Mohammedan world.

Success needed only a raiding force strong enough to maintain its hold on the waterway for a period sufficient for the work of demolition. An earlier volume of this history describes the first attempt made by the Turks, early in 1915, to block the Canal. Marching by the Central Sinai route, and down the course of the Wady um Muksheib, they actually reached the Canal and launched pontoons before being driven off by British troops. Then, although their casualties amounted to at least 3,000, they had no difficulty in making their withdrawal. They simply retraced their footsteps into the desert, taking their guns with them. That attack first demonstrated what was endorsed again and again in the Sinai operations—the ease with which, in the desert, a defeated force can break off an engagement and escape over its lines of communication. Retreating upon sharply defined wells or oases, which its rear-guard can deny to the pursuers long enough to exhaust their offensive capa-

city, it goes its way in safety. This explains what would otherwise seem the almost incredible audacity of the Turk in venturing across the desolate and sunburnt region of Sinai to attack a greatly superior force, based upon rail and water communications, which had behind it the abundant supplies of the generous Delta of the Nile.

The raid in 1915 introduced British leaders to the Turkish general who was to become so familiar to them in subsequent years. Djemal Pasha was, at the outset of the war, Turkish Minister for Marine. He was, wittingly or unwittingly, the tool of the Germans in the dramatic *Goeben* and *Breslau* incident, and was at least nominally responsible for that attack of German-Turkish gunboats upon the Russian and French vessels at Odessa, which was the ostensible cause of Turkey's entrance into the war. Talaat and Enver had in Djemal a worthy associate.

Mr. Morgenthau has drawn a forceful picture of Djemal. Writing of him as he appeared at the end of 1914 on the eve of his departure to take command of the Fourth Turkish Army in Syria, the United States Ambassador says: "All the members of the Cabinet and other influential people in Constantinople assembled to give this departing satrap an enthusiastic farewell. They hailed him as the 'Saviour of Egypt,' and Djemal himself, just before his train started, made this public declaration: 'I shall not return to Constantinople until I have conquered Egypt.' The whole performance seemed to me to be somewhat bombastic. Inevitably I called to mind the third member of another bloody triumvirate who, nearly two thousand years before, had left his native land to become the supreme dictator of the East, and Djemal had many characteristics in common with Mark Antony. Like his Roman predecessor, his private life was profligate; like Antony, he was an insatiate gambler, spending much of his leisure over the card-table at the *Cercle d'Orient*. Another trait which he had in common with the great Roman orator was his enormous vanity. The Turkish world seemed to be disintegrating in Djemal's time, just as the Roman Republic was dissolving in the days of Antony. Djemal believed that he might himself become the heir of one or more of its provinces and possibly establish a dynasty.

He expected that the military expedition on which he was now starting would not only make him the conqueror of Turkey's fairest province, but one of the powerful figures of the world. Afterwards in Syria he ruled as independently as a mediæval robber baron, whom in other details he resembled; he became a king or sub-Sultan, holding his own court, having his own selamlık, issuing his orders, dispensing freely his own kind of justice, and often disregarding the authorities at Constantinople. . . .

"His eyes were black and piercing; their sharpness, the rapidity and keenness with which they darted from one object to another, taking in apparently everything with a few lightning-like glances, signalised cunning, remorselessness, and selfishness to an extreme degree. Even his laugh, which disclosed all his white teeth, was unpleasant and animal-like. His black hair and black beard, contrasting with his pale face, only heightened this impression. At first, Djemal's figure seemed somewhat insignificant—he was undersized, almost stumpy, and somewhat stoop-shouldered. As soon as he began to move, however, it was evident that his body was full of energy. Whenever he shook your hand, gripping you with a vice-like grasp, and looking at you with those roving, penetrating eyes, the man's personal force became impressive. Whatever feeling Djemal may have entertained towards the Entente, he made little attempt to conceal his detestation of the Germans. It is said that he would swear at them in their presence—in Turkish, of course—and he was one of the few important Turkish officials who never came under their influence. The fact was that Djemal represented that tendency which was rapidly gaining the ascendancy in Turkish policy—Pan-Turkism. He despised the subject peoples of the Ottoman country—Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Circassians, Jews; his ambition was to Turkify the whole Empire. His personal ambition brought him into frequent conflict with Enver and Talaat; they told me many times that they could not control him. It was for this reason that, as I have said, they were glad to see him go—not that they really expected him to capture the Suez Canal and drive out the English."

The United States Ambassador's unattractive picture of

Djemal was confirmed by all that was learned of this Turkish general during the war. Djemal was throughout notorious in Syria and Palestine for his profligate personal living, his ostentatious display, his ferocious cruelty towards all Christians, especially to those suspected of sympathy with the Allies, and his constant antagonism to the Germans associated with him in his conduct of the campaign. That he was a man of conspicuous native ability was demonstrated by the firm manner in which he controlled the large hostile Christian and Arab elements of the population among whom he operated; and by the degree to which he maintained his influence against the Germans, under circumstances which would have been destructive to the prestige of any man not gifted with his pronounced strength of character.

The Turco-German armies engaged in the Palestine campaign were interwoven on a system which was a striking tribute to Germany's political and military sagacity. In the constitution of those armies, in Palestine as in Gallipoli, the Turks overwhelmingly predominated in number. It was they, almost without exception, who manned the trenches; when an assault was made, Turkish bodies almost alone were exposed to the British fire, while the Germans, supported in some measure by the Austrians, supplied all the brains and the mechanism. The airmen and machine-gunners were German; the artillerymen were Germans and Austrians; Germans operated the telephones and signals, and drove the motor-transport. This distribution of activities had a dual purpose. It aimed at producing a composite army of the highest possible morale and efficiency; but it also aimed—and this was equally important—at giving to a handful of Germans the actual physical control of the large Turkish forces. The German High Command appreciated fully that in this great war, in which all the scientific, industrial, and business talent and capacity of the world's leading Powers were ranked in two opposing forces, the quality of the combatants was of two distinct grades. In the first grade there were, at the end of 1915, the British, French, and Germans. In the second grade, and far inferior, were the troops of such relatively backward and primitive peoples as the Turks, Serbs, Bulgars, and Russians. Not only were these latter

peoples without the latest scientific and complex destructive machinery of war, but, as the various campaigns proved, when that machinery was put into their hands, they lacked the training and dexterity essential for its effective use. The Germans realised that it would be useless to attempt suddenly and speedily to train Turkish peasants, unaccustomed even to modern agricultural machinery, in the use of modern artillery, machine-guns, aircraft, or even motor-traction on the roads. A far simpler and more effective arrangement was to man these services themselves, and restrict the Turk to the rifle, which he understood and used with a steadiness and accuracy scarcely excelled by any troops in the war.

Military necessity therefore dictated the character of the composite Turco-German armies. But political needs were equally strong in its favour. In controlling all the technical services Germany controlled the Turkish armies. With the artillery and machine-guns in her hands she could, and on more than one occasion actually did, exercise physical pressure on any Turkish troops who showed a tendency to mutiny or a disposition to retire before what they considered excessive punishment from the British. The control of motor-transport gave the German Staff the power to regulate—if occasion had arisen, even to cut off—supplies to the Turkish infantry, a power highly useful in the event of mass murmurings against discipline. But most important of all, as an agent of influence, was the possession of the telephone and wireless system, which gave Germany control over the supply of news to the Ottoman forces. By this simple means Berlin was able, during a number of years, to keep hundreds of thousands of fighting Turks in complete ignorance of the real progress of the war, and to feed them daily with news of German victories. The ignorance of the Turkish peasant is at all times profound. He is a man of very little mental curiosity. It was not surprising therefore to find the common soldier, when captured, utterly in the dark as to affairs in the outside world. The success of the German scheme was still further disclosed by the discovery of the same depth of ignorance in captured Turkish and Syrian officers, who were frequently men of education and sound, keen intelligence. These officers invariably believed,

even as late as the autumn of 1918, that Germany was certain of victory, and they were frankly sceptical of the news given them by their British captors.

It is clear that early in 1916 Germany had absolute sway over the rank and file of the Turkish armies. Her influence over Talaat, Enver, and the rest of the Young Turk Committee was complete. To work her will undisturbed in Palestine and Syria, it was only necessary to dominate Djemal. Here her scheme did not run so smoothly. Turkish mass sentiment, and the vanity of individual Young Turks, for a long time demanded that the command of the Turkish armies should not be nominally in German hands. The ideal position for Berlin would have been to secure a Turkish general as a mere figurehead. But this required a man without character and personal force, and Djemal was strong in these qualities. Doubtless Germany would have liked to withdraw Djemal; but here she was thwarted by his strong hold on his troops, and also by Talaat and Enver's determination to keep their forceful and troublesome colleague, if possible, out of Constantinople. The Germans therefore had to accept Djemal, and make the best of him.

We have seen that early in 1916 the soldiers of Turkey were strongly disposed towards further campaigning. The god of battles had favoured their arms. They had won in Gallipoli; they were winning on the Euphrates; they had pleasant memories of grim orgies among the men and women and the alien riches of Armenia. Germany and the Young Turks now held up before them the wealthy storehouse of Egypt. Their desire for plunder was aroused; their instinct for fighting, always smouldering, now flamed strongly. It needed only an appeal, such as their leaders made, to their religious feelings to complete them as an army of capable, eager, inspired soldiers. The campaign was launched in the spring of 1916. By its inauguration Germany's diplomatic and strategic conceptions were translated into action.

CHAPTER II

AFTER GALLIPOLI

INSPIRED by a flash of genius which was unfortunately accidental and fleeting, the Gallipoli operations were marred from the outset by impulsive politicians, vaingloriously trying their prentice hands in the art of war. During the eight months of the occupation all that could be done by uplifted resolve, by dazzling, self-sacrificing valour, by cheerful suffering, was done in the hope of retrieving what Moltke refers to as an initial error in distribution. Splendid young manhood never lavished itself with less reserve. With a magnificent indifference to the cost, every possibility was gladly exploited by the men of Anzac and Helles to attain to the goal which seemed so near at hand. But from first to last the effort of the soldier was foredoomed to failure.

A remarkable personal note ran through the effort at Anzac. Never in all the history of war, perhaps, was there a campaign in which the individual soldier, fighting far away from his native soil, was so deeply pledged and consecrated to his mission. Never was an invading force withdrawn from alien soil with its officers and men more borne down by grief at their failure. In some measure this feeling was due to the strong sporting instinct of the young men of Australia and New Zealand. But the real cause had a deeper and nobler origin. Anzac was the first great battleground of these sister Dominions. The men who fought had a profound, if unexpressed, sense of the significance of their enterprise. By their work at Anzac would the world know them, and not only them, but the two new nations which had sent them forth into ordeal of battle among the old warring Powers. By their work would the standard of valour be set for all time in lands destined some day to breed many-millioned nations. Conscious of the prestige they enjoyed as the descendants of a race whose victories were world-wide on a thousand fields, these children of spacious young countries were impelled by the vision of their assured and splendid future. They strove to

do honour to the ashes of their fathers in a land that was old, and to set the stamp of glory on their children in a land new and hitherto untried.

They fought with all the might and resource of their proud exuberant manhood; but in vain they flung themselves at the overshadowing enemy stronghold. The hopes of youth are high, its disappointments keen; and the grief they knew at their failure was deeper and sharper because of the comrades whom they abandoned by withdrawal. Old countries, accustomed to the inevitable passing of each successive generation, accept the tragedy of death with more philosophy than lands which are new. Experienced campaigners develop a merciful indifference, if only in a relative degree, to the death of their comrades in arms. But the young men of Anzac were the children of a virgin unblooded country, unused to the tragedies of battle. They sorrowed greatly for their dead, and that sorrow was intensified when the time came for those who had fallen to be deserted and surrendered to the enemy. Very sore at heart were the Anzacs as they stole away in the night, leaving their dead, and their enterprise unfulfilled.

They re-embarked in wretched condition. Haggard, ragged, and unkempt, their bodily depression was increased by the bitter disappointment in their minds. But they were still a force high in moral qualities. Gallipoli was not a soldiers' failure. The fighting men had not blundered or faltered. They had strained human endeavour to the breaking point. The failure was higher up. The tragedy of Gallipoli lies to the discredit of Whitehall. Its fate was the common fate of so many subsidiary operations in the war. It received only the casual remnant of the British Cabinet's attention, and, what was infinitely worse, at times the casual remnants of generals who were sent out, as at Suvla, to conduct critical operations.

The rank and file knew these things, and this knowledge explains the stout spirit, and the strong disposition for further participation in the war, which shone out of every bedraggled unit as the transports cleared the *Ægean*. Uppermost in the men's minds was the conviction that on the Peninsula they had not been given what the soldier terms a "fair spin," and they looked forward to other war ventures under conditions

which might yield to them and to the Empire some tangible reward for their endeavour. This trend of thought was particularly strong in the regiments of the Australian Light Horse. These men had gone to Gallipoli twice volunteers. They had enlisted in Australia for the mounted service; but, when the infantry had sailed from Egypt for the Peninsula, the light horsemen had urged upon their leaders and the Australian Government that they should be permitted to leave their horses behind and go to the support of the sorely tried men at Anzac. The work of the light horse, when fighting as infantry in Gallipoli, has been fully treated in another volume of this history, and need not be touched upon here. From May, when the first dismounted regiments went ashore at Anzac Cove, down to the Evacuation they had their full share of the fighting. They were of the same stock and, in numberless cases, of the same families as the doughty infantry, and throughout they displayed the same high qualities of battle discipline, resource, initiative, and fiery daring.

By the light horsemen Gallipoli was never looked upon as anything more than a sporting digression, imposed by the fickle circumstance of war. Their thoughts turned constantly from the Peninsula to their horses in Egypt, and to the mounted work for which they had originally volunteered. They returned to Egypt ignorant of their future, but strong in the hope that when their next campaign opened they would ride out to battle. Despite the bitterness of their disappointment the men of the light horse, like the Anzacs as a whole, viewed Gallipoli in its proper proportions as a subsidiary operation in a great world-wide war. They felt, too, that world-wide strategy had dictated the Evacuation, and that the army, although its purpose had failed, had not been overwhelmed in action, routed, demoralised, or disgraced. That fact must be appreciated if the exuberant self-confidence and high morale of Australia's mounted forces immediately after Gallipoli is to be properly understood.

During many thousands of years Egypt, abundant in riches and yet strategically so defenceless, has been accustomed to the presence of great alien armies. On the sands around the Pyramids, ever since the vague beginnings of history, camp fires have illuminated the faces of the fighting men

of nearly all the great conquering races. The light desert air has been startled by the ribald stories and careless laughter of soldiers of every race and colour. Ethiopians and Arabs, Babylonians and Assyrians, Greeks and Romans, Turks and French, all have had swift, dramatic, but always ephemeral triumphs over the defenceless Egyptians. Nearly all the world's ambitious captains have at some time in their victorious progress led their hosts toward the wealth of the Lower Nile, and then, corrupted and softened by the easily-won riches, have passed away, leaving scarcely more impression upon the character and the breed of the eternal Egyptian than the footsteps of their troops have left upon the desert sands. Egypt and the Egyptians, always so vulnerable and so often prostrated by conquest, have survived ages after their conquerors have faded and almost vanished, and remain still the modern world's one strong, sure link and guide to a civilised existence which was mature and ancient long before the wanderings of the patriarchs of the Old Testament.

But of all the vast foreign armies to encamp upon the desert which borders the fertile mud of the Lower Nile, none was ever so various and significant in its composition and so diverse in its missions as the great battle host of the British Empire which swarmed over northern Egypt in the early months in 1916. When the Evacuation was complete, the British force in Egypt exceeding 300,000 men. It included British Regulars and Territorials from every part of the United Kingdom, Indians from the fighting tribes of British India, infantry and light horse from Australia and New Zealand. The old land rang and throbbed with the disembarkation of troops and the making of camps, with the bustle of re-equipment and the renewed training of men. The hospitals were overflowing with the victims of Gallipoli; and great numbers of troops not actually sick were for a time physically impoverished and in need of a season of rest. But the army of Gallipoli as a whole began at once to show a remarkable revival in condition. The winter season was cool and stimulating. After the hard and narrow rations of Anzac, the Australians were refreshed and strengthened by the rich supplies of Egypt, and the work of the medical units quickly decreased as the men enjoyed again plentiful rations of fruit.

vegetables, and other fresh foodstuffs. There was little thought of rest or recreation. The Gallipoli forces were scarcely settled into camp before each unit was stirred by rumours of new enterprise, and the troops, affected with the restlessness which always goes with campaigning, were alert with expectation.

From the outbreak of war Egypt had been a great British camp. In its central situation between England in the north and India and Australia and New Zealand in the east and south, its commanding position in regard to Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, southern France, and Salonika, its suitability for the accommodation and training of large armies, and its almost unlimited local supplies of many kinds of fresh produce, it combined most of the essentials of a military base on a grand scale.

The evacuation of Gallipoli released a great Turkish force from the Peninsula, and took a heavy strain off the controlling German machine. But it also gave to England a huge force of men for immediate use in other fields. There was no lack of fresh employment for the troops from Anzac, Helles, and Suvla. In February Germany's titanic blow fell upon Verdun, and the whole Allied line in France was urgently in need of reinforcements. British fortunes in Mesopotamia had reached their darkest hour. Townshend fought at Ctesiphon in November, and retreated immediately to Kut, where he was closely invested. Additional troops were imperatively needed, both for East and West. The British Cabinet decided promptly. The great force in Egypt was to be reduced as expeditiously as the re-formation of its emaciated divisions made their embarkation practicable, and they were to be transported without delay to the posts of danger. The Suez Canal must of course be made safe; and enough troops must be held to deal with the elusive, thrusting Senussi on the Western Desert, and with the various tribes which were giving spasmodic trouble in Upper Egypt and in the Soudan. Beyond that, every man must be made ready to embark.

The vicissitudes of the campaign in Sinai, Palestine, and Syria, in which the Australians played a part so pronounced and decisive, become more easy of understanding if the policy of the British Cabinet in relation to the war with Turkey is

clearly appreciated. Britain's three great campaigns against Turkey—in Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, and Palestine—were all more or less accidental in their origin and half-hearted in their conduct. All were opposed by powerful elements. They found no favour with the British High Command in France, which believed the Western Front to be the critical and decisive theatre. The French were hostile to them on the same ground, and upon other grounds suggested by obvious political suspicion. French statesmen very naturally looked with dissatisfaction upon a distribution of Allied strength which tied the French armies to the unprofitable Western Front, while permitting England by the exercise of her sea power and the employment of expeditionary forces to add indefinitely to her Empire abroad. The British Cabinet, unfortunately situated, followed a middle course, the worst policy of all. The campaigns were sanctioned and undertaken without the enthusiasm, resolution, or military strength necessary to ensure their vigorous prosecution. Neither in Gallipoli nor in Mesopotamia, nor yet in Palestine at any time before 1917, was there a deliberate and concentrated effort to destroy the enemy forces and achieve decisive success. Weak, spasmodic thrusts with inadequate forces were launched in plenty. But there was nothing which showed that the Cabinet was seized of the first principle in warfare—the complete destruction of the enemy.

In France, such a consummation was impossible, either for the Allies or for the Germans. But on other fronts it was not only possible but practicable. Germany did it again and again. In swift, overwhelming campaigns she destroyed Serbia in 1915 and Roumania in 1916. She shattered the Russian armies by the employment of the same resolute, decisive methods, and in 1917 she almost forced Italy out of the war. Contrast this masterful strategy and decisive action in subsidiary campaigns with the feeble performances of the Allies. With the single exception of the conquest of some of the German colonies, which was little more than a round-up of greatly inferior forces, Britain in all of her campaigns outside France nowhere forced a decision until the great enemy collapse came on all fronts in 1918.

It is necessary to emphasise this tragic indecision and half-hearted enterprise at Whitehall, in order that justice should be done to the unfortunate British commanders of the various oversea campaigns, and to the armies they led. Sir Ian Hamilton at Gallipoli, Sir Archibald Murray¹ in Palestine, and various British leaders in Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and East Africa, suffered the same disability. For years such men were a mere afterthought of the Cabinet. They and their campaigns were subordinated in an extreme degree to the war in France and Flanders. When France was fully furnished, they received the overflow; when the Western Front called for any of their divisions, they were required immediately to release and embark them, regardless of the consequence to their own operations. Bitter indeed was the lot of the commanders-in-chief of these subsidiary armies. But the British policy had this sure result—it played from first to last into the hands of Germany. It accomplished during a number of years very little good for England or harm to her enemy abroad; but it kept not less than a million British soldiers out of France during many desperate struggles on a colossal scale.

Sir Archibald Murray, who on the 10th January, 1916, took over command of the Eastern Expeditionary Force (as well as that of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, in which he succeeded General Sir Charles Monro²), was perhaps the chief victim of this wretched policy. General Murray was a British officer of marked distinction. Born in 1860, he had fought with credit as a battalion commander in the South African War, and in the decade before 1914 had attracted notice and advanced rapidly in his profession by his capacity as an organiser and his deep knowledge of strategy. He was Sir John French's first Chief of Staff in France, and the Field-Marshal was unstinted in appreciation of the quality of his services during the famous retreat from Mons and the subsequent fighting of the first seven divisions. Murray possessed some great qualities as a soldier, and many charming qualities as a man. But he was the wrong man for Egypt at

¹ Gen. Sir Archibald Murray, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O. p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; b. Sutton, Surrey, Eng., 21 April, 1860.

² Gen. Sir Charles Monro, Bt, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; b. 15 June, 1860. Died, 7 Dec. 1929.

MAP



TURKEY IN ASIA, SHOWING

No. 1



that time. Between the date of his appointment, early in 1916, and his withdrawal in July, 1917, he accomplished important and enduring work for the Empire; but he possessed weaknesses which marred his performance as a leader and were prejudicial to his own personal interest. His political sense was very shrewd. His strategic conceptions in Sinai and southern Palestine were bold and sound. So far as he failed, he failed mainly because he was a bad judge of capacity in others, and because of his personal generosity. He was too generous in his attitude to the Western Front, too generous in his obedience to the War Office, too generous in his confidence in his chief subordinates. His generosity, indeed, rather than his mistakes was his undoing in Egypt. Only a leader of independent, even selfish, aggressive, and persuasive character had a reasonable chance of success in any of England's subsidiary campaigns. An unselfish man like Murray, compliant to the wishes of the Cabinet, was almost certain to sacrifice his professional reputation.

Immediately after the return of the Gallipoli army to Egypt, General Murray's command was, as we have seen, little more than a great reinforcement camp. The British troops in the Balkans, who had their base at Salonika, were also under his direction; but then and for a long time afterwards there was no thought of that force becoming actively aggressive. Britain was not disposed to undertake a rigorous campaign against the Bulgars and their allies, nor apparently was her understanding with the French in regard to the Balkans satisfactory enough for joint Anglo-French operations. In Egypt, though the people were restless, there was no actual disturbance. The Senussi campaign was virtually over. Except for the defence of the Canal, Murray's one active concern was with the training, equipment, and embarkation of troops to France and Mesopotamia.

His embarrassments began early. The War Cabinet, while insisting upon absolute safety for the Canal and for Egypt, demanded at the same time the release of every man who could be spared for other fields of activity. Murray, with rare loyalty to his old friends in France, and never disputing the fact that in the West lay the decisive campaign, from first to last exercised every endeavour to supply the troops

demanded. At that time neither he nor the British Cabinet had any serious thoughts of an invasion of Palestine; but, in his desire to aid the campaigns in France and Mesopotamia, he consented to reduce his force to a level which made even the defence of the Canal and the policing of restless Egypt a matter of grave concern to himself and his lieutenants.

Late in 1915, when the destruction of the Serbian barrier between the Central Powers and the Near East opened the railroad for the transport of German and Austrian troops and supplies to the outposts of the Turkish Empire, increased attention was given to the defence of the Canal and of Egypt. The whole scheme for guarding the Canal was changed. At the time of Djemal's abortive attack, early in 1915, the defences had rested on the waterway itself, and they remained there until the end of that year. The new scheme was attributed to Kitchener, who is reported to have said, during his visit towards the end of that year, "Instead of you guarding the Canal, the Canal is guarding you." Whether the Minister for War initiated the change may be open to doubt, but the weakness of the old situation is apparent. With the British front line running practically along the banks of the Canal—a clearly defined target—the waterway was always open to damage by long range gun-fire, and a lucky shot, hitting and sinking a large steamer, might have caused a prolonged stoppage to shipping. Moreover, it was, as Djemal had proved, open at any time to a resolute thrust by raiders.

At the beginning of 1916, therefore, these considerations led to the pushing out of the defensive trenches about twelve miles into the Sinai desert. The line was then divided into three sectors, numbered 1, 2, and 3, from south to north, and based respectively on Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said. A number of light Decauville railways linked the trenches with the Canal. At that time there was little or no sign of the enemy, and the defending troops, which included some Australian infantry brigades from Gallipoli, were chiefly engaged in trenching, timbering, and wiring. The desert season was at its prime, with cool, clear days and crisp, keen nights. But the battalions were fully occupied. The barren waste of Sinai is a nursery of strong winds. Its millions of sand-dunes are as mobile almost as the waves of the ocean. The trenches

filled nearly as fast as the men dug them; so fine and pure and dry is the sand that even revetted trenches filled and refilled, and kept the soldiers constantly engaged. It was the beginning of a work which, continuing by day and night, extended nearly all the way across the wide stretch of the desert of northern Sinai.

The war in Sinai and Palestine was to a decisive degree a struggle between the efficiency of two great systems of communications. The battleground was on territory practically neutral, and far removed from the man-power and supplies of the two combatants. The Turk does not live in Palestine any more than the British people live in Egypt. Britain in the struggle probably drew more man-power from Egypt, in the Egyptian Labour Corps, than the Turks drew from Palestine and Syria combined. Turkey obtained supplies of foodstuffs from those two countries, but not on the scale on which England drew upon Egypt; and Egypt was the nearer source.

The Suez Canal is by sea some 3,200 miles from London and 6,700 miles from Australia, and by land 1,400 miles from Constantinople and 2,900 miles from Berlin. It can scarcely be said that the enemy enjoyed what are known as inside lines of communications. From Berlin to Constantinople, on the old international railroad, the war service when established was fairly rapid and efficient. But from Stamboul to the East, over the Baghdad line, trains were always slow and subject to prolonged delays. That line, as far as Aleppo, carried reinforcements and supplies of two large armies, one on the Euphrates and one in Palestine. From Stamboul to Rayak, the junction in the Baalbek Valley between Damascus and Beirut, it was of standard gauge; but the tunnels through the Taurus were not completed until October, 1918, and all transport was in consequence delayed. From Rayak to the south the single line was only of metre gauge, and its capacity was limited. To transport troops from Constantinople to Aleppo during the war occupied from twelve to sixteen days, and from Aleppo to southern Palestine from ten to fourteen days. England therefore probably had, despite the submarine menace and the slow sea-transport it imposed, the better position in regard to communications. And her sea power, enabling her as it did to menace constantly the long enemy coast-line from

the Dardanelles to Sinai with threats of landings which may or may not have been mere feints, enabled her to keep large enemy forces out of action during the whole campaign.

CHAPTER III

THE LIGHT HORSEMAN AND HIS HORSE

THE Australian Light Horse, to which this volume gives particular attention, was in body and spirit the true product of the wide Australian countryside. On its peace footing before the war, it represented the mounted arm of the Commonwealth Military Forces. It was then composed of twenty-three regiments, with a total strength of 456 officers and 6,508 men of other ranks. Some of the regiments, whose recruiting areas were close to cities and towns, included a small number of townsmen; but the light horse as a whole was essentially a force of countrymen, most of whom actually bred and owned the horses on which they did their few weeks of compulsory annual training.

The light horse was not a cavalry force. Its members were not armed with sword or lance. They were mounted riflemen, or in other words, mounted infantry, and their horses were intended merely to give them the greatest range of activity as a mobile body. The men were not trained in shock tactics—a point to be borne in mind in order to follow intelligently their work in Sinai and Palestine. Many of them, including a large number of their officers, had served with distinction as mounted riflemen in the South African War, only twelve years earlier, and the lessons learned against the elusive Boers had a strong influence upon their efficiency. The light horsemen, therefore, when they embarked for Egypt, were well schooled in the main principles of any mounted task which might be ahead of them. In this they had, perhaps, some advantage over the Australian infantry. Nearly all the Australian volunteers who served in South Africa were mounted soldiers, so that the light horsemen of 1914 might have been expected to include in their ranks a larger proportion of experienced veterans than were to be found in the infantry battalions.

The outbreak of war was followed by a spirited rush to the recruiting stations in every Australian country district. From the 12,000-mile coast-line to the very heart of the

continent, 1,500 miles inland, young men bade farewell to their farms and their "runs" and rode in to place themselves at the disposal of their country. Many of them offered not only themselves but also their cherished horses. They represented every phase of Australia's diverse rural industries: dairymen and small cultivators from the long rich coastal belt between the Dividing Range and the sea; orchardists from the foot-hills; timber-getters from the sparkling forests on the ranges; men from the larger farms of the long wheat-belt, on the inside slope of the mountains; and men whose lives had been spent on the sheep and cattle stations of the vast inland plains. On hundreds of outback stations there are intervals of days, sometimes of weeks, between successive arrivals of mails and newspapers. Many of the men lived in those remote areas—which are exempt from compulsory military training—and had never seen a soldier's uniform. But the response of the lonely settler of the interior and the far north, and farther north-west, was as instant and whole-hearted as the response of those who dwelt within sight of passing trains and steamers. Every worn road and grass-grown track carried its eager, excited volunteers, some riding singly, some in twos and threes. Squatters and stockmen and shearers, farmers and labourers and prospectors, they paced the same road in that spirit of true democracy, which, as the war went on, became perhaps the most beautiful and valuable of all the great qualities that in this war shone out of the Australian soldier.

Looking back upon that throng of great-hearted countrymen riding in to enlist for service overseas, one ceases to feel astonishment at the war deeds of the Australian light horsemen. For these men were the very flower of their race. All were pioneers, or the children of pioneers. Ninety-seven out of every hundred came from pure British stock; they were children of the most restless, adventurous, and virile individuals of that stock; many, deserting in their youth the limited holdings of their pioneer fathers near the coast, had followed the explorers' lonely footsteps and "pushed the outposts further out." All were workers; the Australian countryside is not yet old enough to support luxurious drones. All were men of resource, initiative, and resolution; all were accustomed from their earliest boyhood to carry

responsibility, and to take an intelligent interest in the growth of crops or the breeding and care of live-stock. All were horsemen of various degrees of excellence; not mere riders of educated horses, but men who had from their school-days undertaken, as a matter of honour and pride or of necessity, the breaking and backing of bush-bred colts and the riding of any horse that came their way. Their horsemanship came next to, if not sometimes before, their religion.

But horsemanship is only one of the many qualities to be desired in men who are to engage in mounted warfare. These young Australians were by their daily occupation expert observers and judges of country. They possessed a highly-trained sense of distance and direction; accustomed to riding the country roads and tracks by night almost as frequently as by day, they were at home in the dark. Australia possesses no big game, and the rifle is therefore not in general use; but many of these men were familiar with the long-range weapon, and all, or nearly all, were expert with the breech-loading shot-gun.

They were not perhaps horsemasters in the military sense. Few Australian countrymen are called upon to foster their horses with the care which is necessary in the colder countries of the north, where the climate is less kind, and where grazing areas are limited and horses worth more money. The Australian saddle-horse, outside the cities and towns, is seldom fed in a stable, and little time is given to its grooming. When an animal is wanted it is usually brought in from a small paddock near the homestead, cleaned, perhaps, of mud or falling coat, saddled, and ridden. The ride finished, the procedure in most seasons of the year is to remove the saddle and bridle and turn the horse back at once into the paddock without grooming or hand-feeding. The countryside is remarkably free from animal disease; veterinary skill is rarely needed; thanks to good horsemanship, even sore backs are uncommon. If a horse loses its condition because of excessive work, it is spelled, and another brought into use.

This somewhat casual habit was reflected in the quality of the Australian light horsemen as horsemasters on service. They had a great deal to learn before they became highly

efficient in the care of horses worked constantly under very heavy loads and living all the time under artificial hand-fed conditions. But, if at the outset it was found necessary to impress upon them the value of ceaseless grooming, of extreme care in the balanced packing of saddles, and of the greatest possible regularity in feeding and watering, they proved apt and willing learners. They began their campaigning strong in the first essential quality of mounted soldiery; they instinctively understood and loved their horses. The light horseman's horse was something more than the animated machine which served and carried him. It was his respected friend and ally. Very early in the mounted war in Sinai the troopers learned that the asset above price was the good horse, and that the horse evacuated because of debility, or sore back, or any other cause, was never recovered by its former rider. This knowledge, added to the strong affection of the men for their animals, led, as the campaign developed, to a very high standard in horsemastership.

Another factor which gave the Australian countryman natural fitness for his work in Palestine was that he was bred in a land of strong sunshine. From his birth he had been accustomed to very high summer temperatures, to dusty roads, and to the exercise of careful thought concerning water-supply. All who enlisted from inside the Dividing Range had known seasons of short rainfall; all had more than once been compelled to call forth their ingenuity to find water for sheep and cattle and horses. The heat of Sinai was scarcely worse than the heat of many parts of Australia; nor was the scanty supply of water, which restricted operations and often exhausted and disheartened men from colder latitudes, a matter of surprise or serious concern to the light horsemen.

The Australian possessed, therefore, remarkable qualities, both natural and acquired, for a mounted war in a hot, dry country. He was, when engaged in such a war, living and fighting under conditions closely resembling those to which he had been accustomed all his life. He needed only to learn discipline, and to become skilled in the effective use of modern destructive weapons, to be a formidable soldier.

From the moment when war was declared the service proved highly popular with recruits. For some time after the

outbreak of hostilities men could upon enlistment declare the branch of the service in which they would serve; consequently the original light horse regiments were made up almost entirely of countrymen, and to a great extent of men who were then either engaged in their compulsory training or upon the active reserve. The original regiments were further marked, as well as strengthened, by the extent to which they were built up of groups of friends who had enlisted together, and who went to Gallipoli in the same troops and squadrons. The light horse force, as it sailed from Australia in the end of 1914 and early in 1915, was, in brief, a remarkable band of brothers in arms, a capable band drawn from a wide and fragrant countryside, animated by a noble cause, thrilled and expectant with the sense of a grand adventure in foreign lands, and knit together by the common interest of their peace-time callings and the still closer ties of personal friendship and affection. No more wholesome and splendid body of young men ever went out to battle than these rural sons of Australia's pioneers.

They formed a force essentially easy to train and discipline, provided they were handled with quick intelligence and sympathy. British regular officers, without an understanding of their native qualities, sometimes found them difficult; but, as the war developed, it became recognised that the Australian officer who had trouble with the light horsemen was not fit for his command. With the inevitable occasional exception to be discovered in any large body of troops, they were self-respecting men, accustomed to hard-working, independent lives. Like all citizen soldiers, they found rigid discipline irksome, but to all the essentials in that discipline their obedience was instant and absolute. It was as impossible as it would have been disastrous to stamp out the individual in them. Because of the lives they had lived, it was safe to entrust them with some play for their own personality and initiative. Each man, while subscribing fully to the collective command, waged all through the campaign an intense personal war of his own, animated not by any burning racial or national passion against his enemy, but by a sheer impulse, begotten of his pioneer blood, to do with all his will and power a task which interested him or which had to be done. Perhaps the light horseman fired fewer wild, unaimed shots in the war

than any other combatant. He stalked the enemy with the same absorbed interest and deliberation with which he might before the war have stalked a plains turkey. To waste his effort and ammunition in a fight was in his eyes an offence against his personal intelligence.

But the qualities which made him so effective as an individual soldier, and his fire discipline so absolute and unbreakable, rendered him impatient of that side of discipline which may be termed purely ceremonial. When away from his own officers, he was somewhat indifferent to the rigid rules of saluting; and this attitude, together with the disdain with which he regarded all army formality and etiquette which did not, to his rational mind, have some direct bearing on his work as a fighting soldier, produced much embarrassment, and at times even strained the relations between the light horse commands and the British General Staff in Egypt and Palestine. The evolution of the light horseman in these respects was interesting and typical of his strong individuality. In the early days of the war he was remarkable among the Australian force as a whole for punctilious observance of formalities. But as he learned the grim lessons of war, and became more and more effective as a fighting man, he grew less regardful of army ceremonial.

All through the war the light horseman tried things by the light of his strong common sense. On a hard-riding advance, when victory depended upon speed, and speed upon a supply of horsefeed, he did not hesitate to help himself to any grain or other fodder possessed by the natives of the country. Orders forbidding such conduct might have been couched in the strongest terms; but when it was a choice between failure through loss of horses, and success to be achieved by the commandeering of fodder, he did not hesitate to flout authority. He dismissed such incidents from his mind with the scornful thought that a General Staff which could not settle trifling affairs of that sort with the natives was not fit for its job, and rode on happy because the bulging nosebag ensured an evening meal for his beloved waler.

The light horseman, with all his unconventional ways and his occasional forcefulness, was at heart distinguished by shyness and reserve. The young Australian countryman leads a

simple and peaceful life. He bears himself modestly. One of the first horsemen of the world, and breeding the world's best horses of their kind, he indulges himself in no distinctive horseman's attire. He has none of that picturesque flashness which cowboys of western America and the Canadian northwest of a generation ago inherited from the Spanish pioneers of the Pacific slope. A felt slouch hat, a shirt with the sleeves rolled to the elbows, long trousers, not particularly made for riding, boots, and very gentle spurs make up his everyday dress. He rides, as a rule, in a plain English hunting saddle, and carries neither lasso nor revolver. A temperate man, his one excess is a harmless celebration at the annual races or agricultural show, or on an occasional visit to the capital city of his State; even then the impelling force is the bursting strength of his youth rather than any disposition for strong drink or unwholesome excitement. Men of all young British countries engage in these occasional sprees, which were in fact a stronger feature of the early pioneering days, when most of the settlers were of British birth, than they are among the native-born. The young countryman of the Commonwealth is neither a hard nor a regular drinker, but, when his rare holiday comes, he engages whole-heartedly in a joyous demonstration. On occasion he did this at Cairo, and at other places abroad, and his high spirits and forceful, but as a rule quite harmless, carnivals sometimes led to misunderstanding in the minds of men who did not know the native wholesomeness of his life at home. Any study of the slender "crime" sheets of the light horseman throws a sure light upon his character. The worst offence discoverable there (with the exceptions inevitable in a body of many thousands of men) is that of occasional physical violence, of blows struck in anger. But those tell-tale sheets are clean of all morbid or unmanly offences, and remarkably free from charges of desertion, cowardice, or disobedience to orders in action.

Much that is misleading has been written of the Australian type of manhood. So far as a distinctive type has been evolved, it is to be found among men from the country districts, where there is a preponderance of young men long of limb and feature, spare of flesh, easy and almost tired in

bearing, and with a singular native grace of posture. The head is carried forward on long, powerful shoulders; and this, together with a casual, almost lazy, impression conveyed by the whole figure, and the national tendency to lean the body against fences, trees, vehicles, or the shoulders of a horse, misleads the stranger as to the Australian's great physical strength and superb athleticism. Perhaps no young manhood in any age, not even excepting the Greeks, has been distinguished by so great a love of physical exercises, and so much achievement in competition with men of other countries. But, although the man thus described may be roughly accepted as a national type, the light horsemen rode and fought in all shapes and sizes, from great square-built, heavy but active men like Granville Ryrie¹ to wiry little men like Harry Chauvel.²

The young Australian has never been in the slightest degree of warlike disposition. The national system of compulsory training was purely defensive. Except for an occasional brawl in the gold-digging days, his land has never known bloodshed. The nation has lived its century of hard pioneering, coveting no other people's territory or rights, and, except to a minor extent in its White Australia policy, wounding no people's racial susceptibilities. Nor was there ever in Australia a counterpart to what is known as the "Jingo" element in Great Britain. The keen and surprisingly cynical sense of humour, which is as sharply defined in almost every Australian as his sense of sight or hearing, makes Australians shy of any tangible expression of patriotism. The Australian countryman has never been fond of flying the Union Jack, or even his own Southern Cross flag. His loyalty to Empire is the unconscious loyalty of blood, rather than any defined loyalty to the British Throne. His affection for England is rather affection for the land of his fathers, than for the land that holds the supreme head of his Government. And this affection is strengthened by the fact that every Australian child's education, no matter how scanty, is based upon the

¹ Maj.-Gen. Hon Sir Granville Ryrie, K.C.M.G., C.B., V.D. Commanded 2nd L.H. Bde, 1914/19; Member of Aust. House of Representatives, 1911/27; Asst. Minister for Defence, 1919/22; High Commissioner for Australia in London, 1927/32. Grazier, of Micalago, Michelago, N.S.W.; b. 1 July, 1865. Died, 2 Oct., 1937.

² Gen. Sir Harry Chauvel, G.C.M.G., K.C.B. Commanded Desert Mtd Corps, 1917/19; G.O.C., A.I.F. in Egypt, 1916/19; Inspector-General, in Australia, 1919/30, and C.G.S., 1922/30. Of Clarence River district, N.S.W.; b. Tabulam, Clarence River, 16 April, 1865.

poetry and prose which tells the story of England and Scotland and Wales and Ireland. The countryman has but a rough knowledge of current affairs in England; but he is as well acquainted with the old battle stories of his forefathers and the stirring verse of the race as are his contemporaries in the Mother Country. His racial patriotism is therefore a very real and live thing, which, always smouldering, if without sign of smoke, bursts into flame when the honour of the old land of his fathers is touched, and when that land buckles on the armour of battle. It matters not who or where is the foe; and thus Australia's young manhood found itself engaged in a long and bloody war with Turkey.

There is something unreal and incongruous in the thought of the young Christian Australian Commonwealth engaged in a fight to a finish with the old Moslem Ottoman Empire. Before the war it is improbable that there were a hundred Turks in Australia or a hundred Australians in Turkey. The trade between the two lands was insignificant; direct diplomatic relations did not exist; each country was profoundly ignorant of and indifferent to the other. Apart from an occasional shudder at Armenian atrocities, the young Australian had never thought about Turkey at all; the young Turk had certainly never had occasion to think about Australia. And yet, by the grim circumstance of war, during a number of years each strained its resources and poured out its best manhood in conflict with the other. True, the Australians at Anzac and in Sinai and Palestine made up only a part of the Allied forces engaged; but they were always a great fighting vanguard, and it may safely be said that without them Turkey would not have been so utterly overthrown and destroyed.

Australian and Turk fought therefore as strangers, impelled by no racial antagonism or spirit of revenge, and the struggle, although wholehearted and bloody, was always strangely free from bitterness. The one people waging a "holy war" in preservation of its very life, the other battling for the defence of its motherland and its own place among the nations—no two armies ever fought with less personal animosity a protracted and decisive campaign. Each side killed the other with all its might and main, but neither hated

nor despised the other. The Australians, who always referred to the Turk affectionately as "Old Jacko," regarded him with sincere respect, touched, as was natural in a manhood conscious of race superiority, with pity. They found him a clean, chivalrous fighter, and thought of him, it may almost be said, as a temporarily misguided friend. The Turk in his stolid way returned this good feeling, and always distinguished the Australians and New Zealanders from other troops of the British Army.

Picturesque writers and public speakers during the war often described the British campaign in Palestine as a "New Crusade," and represented our armies as impelled by a strong religious feeling. This was pure literary extravagance. Religious feeling was a factor with the Turks and was exploited by their leaders, but it contributed nothing to the whole-souled energy of the light horse. There was not, it is true, a single soldier, however free may have been his thoughts about religion, who was not moved in his inmost heart by the near approach of the British force to Jerusalem and Nazareth, and by the first crossing of the Jordan as the light horsemen rode towards the frowning uplands of Moab. But that emotion did not have its origin in the thought that the holy places were being wrested from the Moslem. When the young Australians visited the Mosque of Omar, one of the foremost shrines of the Moslem world, they went in a spirit of sheer curiosity, touched perhaps with religious veneration; they felt no exultation at the capture of the enemy's religious stronghold in Palestine. The campaign was in no sense a crusade.

When the regiments embarked for Egypt they were accompanied by their horses, and throughout the campaign these animals were reinforced from Australia. More than that, the Indian cavalry brigades ordered to Palestine in 1918 were mounted almost exclusively on Australian-bred walers. The horses used by the British yeomanry brigades were drawn from various parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Argentine, and Australia; there were also "country-breds" from India and game little animals from Northern Africa, ridden by a regiment of French African regular cavalrymen—spirited horses, showing

much of the blood and quality of the Arab. Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps command, therefore, included horses representing more countries and types than even the men of many lands and races who rode them. Australia's walers, already world-famous for their work in India and in the South African and Russo-Japanese Wars, were in this company subjected to a searching comparative test. They proved by common consent incomparably superior to all their rivals, except, perhaps, the best of the horses from the British Islands, which included a number of valuable hunters and officers' chargers.

Expert horsemen differed as to the best type of horse disclosed by the miscellaneous Australian remounts in the campaign. Some good judges expressed a preference for the stocky, powerful pony types to be found among both the Australian and New Zealand regiments. But although these small animals, many of which possessed Welsh pony blood, had many admirers, the lesson of the war was that, provided a horse had bone and substance, and was not too eager and fretful, the closer it was to the English thoroughbred racing strain the more valuable it was for active service. The horses of a light horse regiment were not uniform. They included every kind of animal; large sturdy ponies, crossbreds from draught Clydesdale mares, three-quarter thoroughbreds, and many qualified for the racing stud-books. As a consequence of such mixed breeding, they frequently offended the horse-lover's eye by their faulty parts. But one quality they all possessed which made them superior to the horses from other lands: they were all, or nearly all, got by thoroughbred sires. This quality, reflected throughout in their spirit and their stamina, was their distinguishing characteristic. During sustained operations, on very short rations of pure grain and no water over periods which extended up to seventy hours—when horses of baser breeds lost their courage and then their strength—the waler, though famished and wasted, continued alert and brave and dependable. The vital spark of the thoroughbred never failed to respond. As long as these horses had strength to stand they carried their great twenty-stone loads jauntily and proudly.

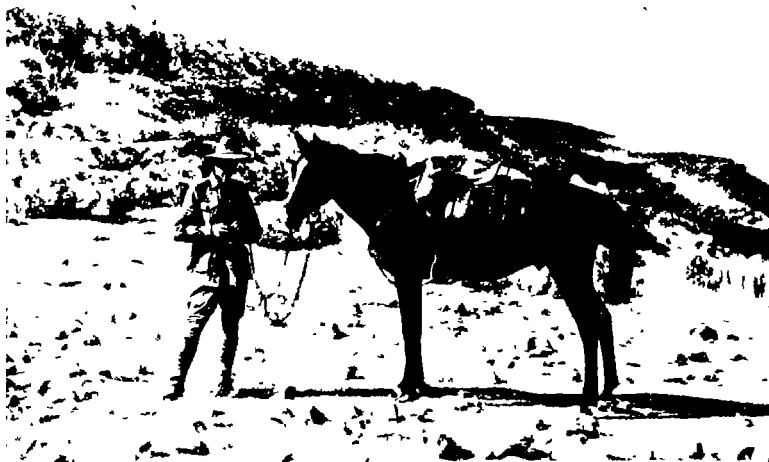
CHAPTER IV

SINAI

THE boundary line between Egyptian Sinai and Turkish Palestine at the outbreak of war ran from the police post at Rafa on the Mediterranean in the north to the head of the Gulf of Akaba in the south. The British in Egypt had therefore a desert barrier, roughly ninety miles in width, guarding the Suez Canal on the east. The administration of Sinai was situated at the little settlement of Nekhl, high in the range close to the centre of the Peninsula; and a few posts, occupied chiefly by Egyptians, were established as a check upon the miserable Bedouin inhabitants. But in this scheme active defence was never contemplated; some time before the Turkish advance of 1915 towards the Canal, the slender garrisons had been withdrawn, and no effort was made to check the march of the enemy.

It is quite clear that the War Office, when sending Murray to Egypt a year later to command the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, had no thought of the invasion of Palestine. He was not even ordered to regain possession of Sinai. His instructions were in fact vague and elastic. General Sir John Maxwell,¹ who had for some time commanded the forces in Egypt, was to continue in that position, and was to be responsible for the security of the Nile Valley, except against aggression by the Turks operating across Sinai. Murray himself was to guard the Canal and the approach to the Delta from the east. In the orders sent to him no definite reference was made to an offensive campaign in Sinai; but he was to maintain a defence sufficiently active to ensure that "no formed body of the enemy should come within artillery range of the Canal." Small bodies of the enemy were not to be allowed to reach the Canal by night, and he was "to endeavour by all means to interfere with the enemy's advanced base and lines of communication." This reference to the enemy's "advanced base and lines of communication"

¹ Gen. Rt. Hon. Sir John G. Maxwell, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O. Officer of British Regular Army; b. 12 July, 1859. Died, 21 Feb., 1929.



LIGHT HORSE SERGEANT, WITH AN AUSTRALIAN HORSE WHICH SERVED
THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN IN SINAI AND PALESTINE, 1916-18

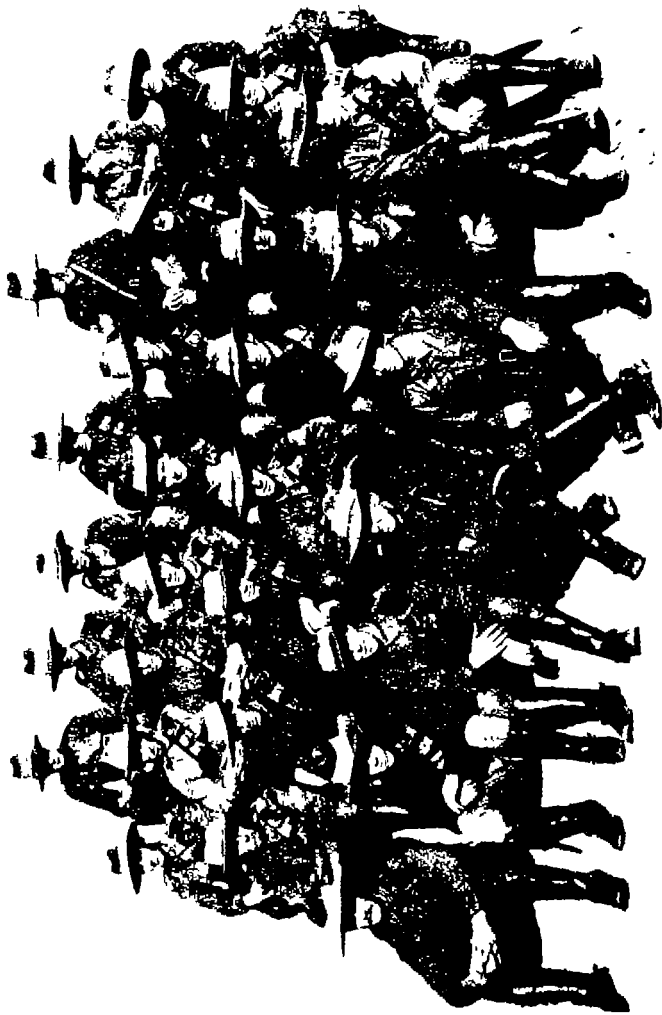
Aust War Museum Official Photo No B126



FOUR AUSTRALIAN HORSES WHICH SERVED THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN
IN SINAI AND PALESTINE, 1916-18

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B515

To face p 40



LIGHT HORSEMEN

Just at Museum Official Photo No B150

To face p 41

was Murray's only authority for an offensive campaign—for at the time when these instructions were given the enemy's "advanced base" was in southern Palestine, more than 100 miles away from the Canal. Possibly the War Office did not recognise the significance of its order. And yet, indefinite as it was, it proved a perfectly sound instruction to the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt at that time, and Murray was quick to appreciate the scope it gave him. Within a few weeks of his arrival in the country he was convinced that, while the Canal could be more surely defended by a line of entrenchments in the desert some miles to the east than by keeping the British force on the banks of the waterway, the only plan which could make the Delta absolutely safe was to advance a force across Sinai to the plains of southern Palestine. From the outset, indeed, he was strongly of the belief that Sinai should be regained and denied to the enemy. But, if the War Office momentarily flattered him with the hope that he would be permitted to engage to a limited extent in aggressive tactics, he was speedily reminded of the lot of all British commanders in charge of subsidiary campaigns during the war. A memorandum attached to his orders read: "You will realise that the force under your command is in a sense a general strategic reserve for the Empire. The enemy's intention in the East is uncertain. The War Committee has decided that for us France is the main theatre of the war. It is therefore important, as soon as the situation in the East is clearer, that no more troops than are absolutely necessary should be maintained there."

This attitude towards Murray's command was maintained throughout his stay in Egypt. There was always a half-hearted suggestion of an active offensive, first in Sinai and afterwards in southern Palestine, or, if not a suggestion, then a lukewarm acquiescence in Murray's proposals for an offensive. But, while permitting or even encouraging Murray to advance, the War Office was ever reminding him of the minor importance of his mission, and impressing upon him the grave consequences which would follow any reverse. For a year at least he was compelled to depend upon troops which, with the exception of the Australians and New Zealanders, were distinctly inferior to the average British troops in

France at that time. For the task he had on hand he was always short in numbers, in quality of men, and in aircraft; and for many months he was short in transport. Worst of all, he never knew from week to week whether his divisions would be arbitrarily taken from him for employment in France or Mesopotamia.

Murray in the circumstances displayed remarkable equanimity and ambition. He accepted cheerfully the decision that his great force in Egypt was a mere "strategic reserve" for the Empire, and urged on the training and embarkation of division after division for service overseas. But all the time he was giving attention to Sinai, and within a few weeks of his arrival had resolved to advance beyond his entrenched line and deny the Peninsula to the enemy. Before the end of January he began a long and unsatisfactory discussion with the War Office as to the size and character of the force he was to be allowed for the protection of the Canal and his march eastwards. At first the War Office promised him two mounted divisions of four brigades each; but this was subsequently reduced to the Anzac Mounted Division, made up of three light horse brigades and the New Zealand brigade, with an additional yeomanry brigade as corps troops—a variation typical of the whole relationship. The same uncertainty marked the allocation of Murray's infantry divisions. Early in 1916 there had been 300,000 troops in Egypt: by August all the infantry available for use at the Battle of Romani were two very raw divisions. The demands made by the War Office had of course to be met; but a leader stronger and more devoted to his own selfish interests would have at least taken steps to ensure that he was not left with the weakest of all the divisions which had been assembled in Egypt after Gallipoli. But Murray's generosity to his friends in France, and his implicit obedience to the Government, were boundless. At one stage the War Office demanded from him one of his few remaining infantry divisions, but left the selection to his discretion. Murray replied that he was sending the 11th, which was his best.

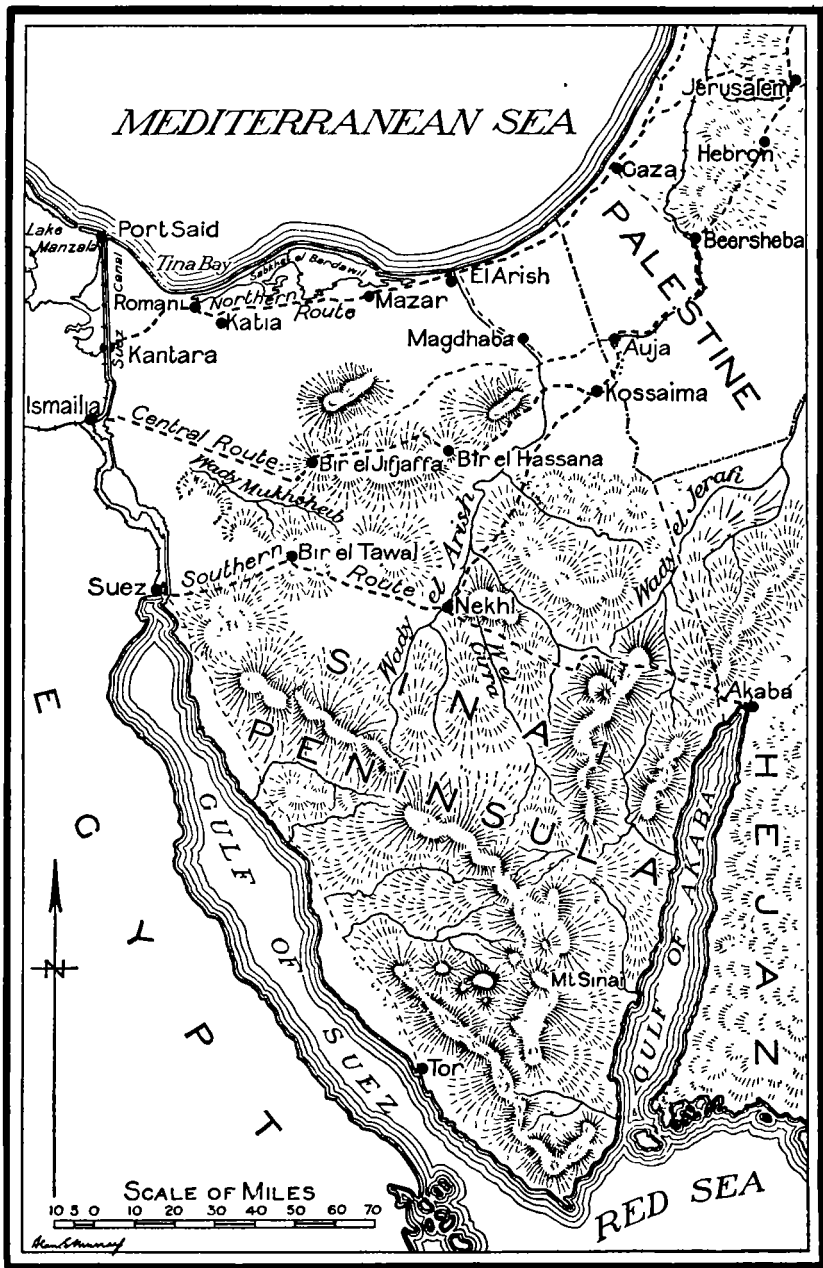
Sinai Peninsula is a rugged triangular-shaped wedge pointing south and rudely driven between Palestine on the east and Egypt on the west. Its wide and sandy northern edge

is washed by the Mediterranean; its mountainous southern extremity, jutting out into the waters of the Red Sea, divides the Gulf of Akaba from the narrow Gulf of Suez. Popular imagination, influenced by the story of the Wandering, exaggerates the importance of the Peninsula as an effective barrier between Africa and Asia. It is true that, broadly speaking, Sinai has served to mark the dividing line between the races of the two continents; but the real barrier has been not the limited wedge of the Peninsula, but the vast desert regions which lie behind the Mediterranean seaboard of Northern Africa. Since time immemorial Sinai has been a great highway of commerce and of war. In every age great armies have marched across its grim wilderness, going down into Egypt, or up to Syria and beyond.

For more than half a century Sinai has been vulnerable at any time to modern engineering as expressed in railways and water-pipes. From the Sweet Water Canal on the west to the permanent spring-water of southern Palestine on the east, the distance is only about 100 miles. Further, as every conquering host has proved, even the desert itself has a large supply of water which, though not good, will slake the thirst of great bodies of men. The crossing of this desert land has been deemed a difficult military undertaking only because the wide intervals between oases necessitated a swift and uninterrupted passage. But rapid progress was generally made easy by the fact that the defenders awaited attack in the well-watered region on their side of the wilderness. The invader was always allowed to pass the desert; the decisive battles were fought either on the fringe of Egypt or on the fertile slopes of southern Palestine. It is a remarkable fact that the British advance across the desert, from the Suez Canal to Gaza, was slower than any crossing, eastwards or westwards, recorded in history. The reason was that as the British marched they built a railway, and laid pipes to convey water from the Nile. But before they crossed so deliberately yet so surely, and by building the railway brought Jerusalem permanently within sixteen hours' comfortable travel of Cairo, the Turks had already, in the earlier stages of the campaign, traversed the Peninsula by its three ancient routes.

There have been in all ages three highways across the Peninsula. Sinai is skirted on the north by an irregular and broken fringe of sand-dunes, which rise from the sea-level on the Mediterranean to a height of a few hundred feet. South of this coastal fringe lies a belt some twenty-five miles wide, made up of rough, scrub-covered plain, broken by barren, stony expanses and scattered masses of raw sand-hills similar to those along the seaboard. This harsh low-lying region rises abruptly into the imposing and awful desert of the mountain system, which, spreading over the central and southern portions of the land and steadily lifting from range to range, culminates in the Mount Sinai group of peaks close to the extreme southern point of the Peninsula. Winding tortuously through the steep mountainous desolation of the south run the paths from Akaba to Suez, either by Nekhl or by a track further south. By this route Moses passed with his great host in the long-drawn Wandering, avoiding as a military necessity the easier approaches to Palestine further to the north. The Turks passed small bodies of troops over these tracks in the earlier stages of the war; and, as the British operations in Sinai developed, Australian forces from the Imperial Camel Brigade rode twice to Akaba to make touch with the Arabs of the Hejaz. The route was easily passable for camels, but impracticable for wheels, and therefore useless for an army equipped with modern artillery.

The central road through the mountains further to the north is the old historical high road between Palestine and Egypt. The boy Joseph was probably carried that way as he went down from Dothan to the land of the Pharaohs. This would also be the most likely route for the Queen of Sheba and her gorgeous train, as well as for the anxious flight of the later Joseph with Mary and the child Jesus Christ. It was the natural southern road from Shechem (the modern Nablus) and Jerusalem, after coming down the highway from Bethlehem and Hebron through Beersheba on the Palestine foot-hills. Djemal used this central road for his advance early in 1915. That was the season for any rain which falls in Sinai; and, although the tracks were rough and broken and many of the gradients very steep, this road possessed a hard surface and was passable for wheels and guns. After



SINAI PENINSULA, SHOWING MAIN ROUTES ACROSS THE DESERT.

leaving the slopes of southern Palestine, the old Negib or south land of the patriarchs, it traverses central Sinai by El Kossaima and Bir Hassana, following the beds of the wadys which are there, as in Judæa and Moab, invariably the high roads. On the west or Egyptian side it descends towards Ismailia by the bed of the Wady um Muksheib, which can be followed to within a day's march of the Canal, or further south by the Darb el Haj to Suez.

The rare rains which refresh the barren uplands of Sinai, are torrential in their downpour, and the brown waters, gathering rapidly, move down the wadys in wide, shallow streams. For a few days there is flood; then, the clouds swiftly passing, blue sky reigns again. There is a quick burst of delicate flowers on the stony mountain sides, and for a few weeks ribbons of green mark the broad damp beds of the wadys. But the water, except in occasional rapidly diminishing pools, vanishes in a few hours. Hence the old cisterns or wells of Sinai and Palestine, which here in the Peninsula have been deeply dug and soundly and permanently stoned and cemented in the beds of the wadys, so that they are filled by the torrents and remain over the summer to sustain the Bedouins and refresh the traveller. Immediately after the declaration of war, parties of Turks cleared and multiplied these Sinai wells, and also put down bores in the oasis areas. Every possible step was taken to ensure an expeditious advance towards Egypt.

At best this central road across Sinai was hazardous. The water-supply, if properly developed, might maintain a small army during a rapid march; but it was so limited that, if the army was checked, it could not stand its ground, but must retreat at once to the surer spring supplies of southern Palestine by the road it had come. It served Djemal for his first raid; but it was too precarious for the more ambitious venture a year later, when, if Egypt was not actually to be invaded, the blocking of the Canal was to be vigorously attempted, and Britain compelled to retain a substantial army in Egypt over a prolonged period.

There remains for brief description and consideration the third or northern highway between Palestine and Egypt. It runs across the sand-hills, close to the Mediterranean all the

way, and scarcely rises above sea-level. It is well supplied, especially towards its western or Egyptian side, with numberless springs of water of varying brackishness, but still, as the progress of so many invading armies has proved, affording a possible supply for troops. The main obstacle to progress over this highway lies in its soft, yielding sands, which make marching for foot soldiers exceedingly slow and exhausting, greatly reduce the activity and usefulness of cavalry, and impose (as they did on the Turks) a great amount of labour for the transport of guns and supplies. This northern route across the sand-dunes lies between the Wady el Arish on the east and the Suez Canal on the west, a distance in a straight line of ninety miles, but for an army marching in and out among the sand-hills, considerably longer.

Syria and Palestine are both abundantly supplied with springs. From many of these the water rises to the surface and feeds perennial streams; in others it is obtained by sinking to various depths. Similar conditions continue down into southern Palestine until the sands of northern Sinai are reached at the Wady el Arish. After leaving El Arish, an army following the northern coastal road across Sinai is faced with a sixty-mile tract which is almost waterless; but then the invader reaches the famous area of springs and palm hods lying around Katia and extending many miles to the south. Armies advancing upon Egypt have always been under the necessity of seizing the Katia wells as a preliminary to the final stage of their invasion. This northern route was followed from east to west by Alexander in his swoop on Egypt, by Napoleon from west to east more than two thousand years later, and by most of the intervening conquerors who marched from the East upon Egypt, or, as fortune varied, from Egypt towards Syria and the Valley of the Euphrates.

During January, 1916, agents reported that about 25,000 Turks were disposed over Sinai. This estimate was undoubtedly an exaggerated one; but Murray was already strong in the belief that an enemy force was at any time to be expected by the northern coastal route, either as a serious menace to the Canal or with the strategic object of compelling a large British force to remain in Egypt. The defensive line,

as we have seen, had already been advanced a few miles eastward into the desert. It was now decided to deny the enemy the Katia waters, and so, if possible, prevent him from establishing a sound base within one or two days' march of the Canal. Murray believed—and in this he was supported by all who knew the country—that the Turks could only operate across the desert peninsula in the winter months. "Any offensive," he said, "must be begun by the end of February while the weather is still cool." He strongly favoured an "offensive defensive," and carefully considered the three possible lines of advance from the Canal eastwards against the enemy. The track from Suez to Nekhl, he wrote, "crosses rough country which would expose us to some danger if the enemy should destroy the Nekhl wells. The line from Ismailia to El Hassana and El Kossaima is ruled out owing to lack of water and the heavy going. The line from Kantara to Katia and El Arish seems to offer in almost every respect the most favourable prospects, and the occupation of El Arish itself seems to be one of the principal essentials in connection with the defence of Egypt from the east. The problem of maintaining a considerable force at Katia is being gone into very closely. Much depends on the reconnaissance of the lagoon Sabkhet el Bardawil and the possibility of a railway to Katia and beyond."

On the 26th of January, 1916, it was decided, under orders from the War Office, to form the Anzac Mounted Division of four brigades with an additional mounted brigade as corps troops. During the winter there had been active aerial reconnaissance of the Turkish positions both in Sinai and in Lower Palestine. Seaplanes, based on the ship *Ben Machree* in the Mediterranean, comprised at the time Murray's only air force; and the adventurous naval pilots watched enemy movement at Gaza, Beersheba, Asluj, and even as far inland as Nekhl and the Wady um Muksheib in central Sinai. They also freely bombed the enemy at some of these places. Beersheba was discovered to be a large and bustling encampment, and already the Turks were digging extensive entrenchments on the line of the Gaza-Beersheba road. Lebanon agents reported important southward movements of troops. Murray was justified in his belief that the enemy would use

every endeavour to advance upon the Canal within the few weeks which remained of the brief cool season.

It was obvious that almost the first consideration in a campaign in Sinai was the provision of transport. The British commander advised the Government that he would require at least 25,000 camels by March and 50,000 by June, and steps were at once taken to assemble this imposing host of animals. To those not familiar with the use of cavalry in desert campaigning the numbers may seem amazing. A mounted brigade in Sinai and Palestine seldom put more than 800 rifles into the dismounted firing line, while an infantry brigade at full strength fights about 3,500 men. But the supplies for a cavalry brigade are greatly in excess of those needed by a brigade of foot. The day's ration for a man weighs only two or three pounds, while that for a horse weighs twenty pounds, and horsefeed is very bulky. Moreover the use of horses in a dry country imposes a heavy task upon those responsible for the supply of water. The daily desert ration of water for a man was at most one gallon; frequently it was cut down to a quart, and at times to a pint. But horses required five gallons; and, although the animals could and often did live on a great deal less, they only did so at the cost of their condition and the rapid decline of their strength and usefulness. It was clear, therefore, that any force moving out into Sinai must be accompanied by a vast transport organisation and an abundant water-supply. Camels in tens of thousands must march on the heels of the fighting advance-guard; immediately upon the rear of the army must follow the railway and the water-pipe.

Murray planned to establish a force 50,000 strong in the area of the Katia oasis. As he was at that time quite without transport for the supply of such a body on the desert, he gave attention to the possibility of serving it from the sea. But this was impracticable. A glance at the map will show that immediately north-east of the Romani-Katia district lies the great Bardawil lagoon—the Serbonian bog of ancient lore—which effectively barred communication with the Mediterranean. Transport across the sands was the only course open, and no time was lost in pushing forward the preliminaries for a broad-gauge railway on which the rolling

stock of the Egyptian Railways could be used. Early in February agents reported 12,000 enemy troops at Jerusalem and 13,000 at Beersheba, with evidence of movement from Beersheba towards Katia. The new Turkish railway from Beersheba to Asluj in southern Palestine was almost completed, and there was a great mass of war material at rail-head. On February 8th Murray advised the War Office that he was "pressing on preparations, especially as regards construction of railways, for the occupation of the Katia district." Meanwhile on January 23rd a composite British force, including Indians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Australians, had captured and burned the Senussi camp at a point twenty-five miles west of Mersa Matruh, and so eased British anxiety about the Egyptian western desert.

Between February and April, 1916, events marched swiftly towards the Sinai campaign. Murray advised the War Office that to rely for the defence of Egypt upon the construction of a strong defensive position close to the Canal would be "wasteful in men and material." It would be "far preferable to push out across Sinai towards its eastern frontiers"; and he added that "less troops would be required for an active defence than for a passive defence of the Canal zone." With a sound appreciation of the country, he anticipated that the line of the enemy's advance would fall between El Kossaima and the Mediterranean. "Strategically, therefore," he wrote, "the base of the defensive zone of Egypt against invasion from the east is not the eighty or ninety miles of the Canal zone but the forty-five miles between El Arish and El Kossaima." Murray thought it might be possible for the enemy, marching by that route, to bring 250,000 men across Sinai in the cool weather; but in February, when the cool season was quickly closing, there was no sign of any invasion on a large scale. Intelligence reports indicated that the Turks were anxious to invade Egypt, but that the Germans were hostile—probably a shrewd guess, since, although the Germans wished to demonstrate in sufficient strength to pin down as many British troops as possible in Egypt, they were far too sound in their knowledge of the situation to anticipate success from a definite attack. Murray estimated that, if the enemy did not advance until after the early spring, water

difficulties would prevent his bringing more than 25,000 men as far as the Katia area; and in this estimate he again displayed a good sense of the situation.

Murray was anxious to anticipate the Turks both in the Katia area, about twenty-five miles east of the Canal, and at El Arish; sixty miles further east. He considered that, if the enemy secured those two localities, he could keep 80,000 troops round Katia, even in the hot weather. Had that been accomplished, the German aim would have been achieved, and a great and purely British army must have been retained over an indefinite period to defend the Canal. With a British army at El Arish Murray could effectively oppose any forces travelling by the northern road, and attack in flank any Turkish columns which might attempt to avoid the coast and cross central Sinai by the Kossaima-Hassana route. He would also be in a position to undertake rapidly offensive operations against enemy concentrations or the heads of enemy columns in southern Palestine. By the middle of February, however, a British advance in strength would be impracticable owing to lack of transport. Supplies could not be drawn by way of the coast. The necessary camels for land transport had not yet been purchased and assembled. It was imperative, therefore, to begin at once to push out the railway into the desert.

On February 20th the first troops were advanced beyond the infantry defences towards Katia, one squadron of yeomanry, two machine-guns and fifty men of the Camel Corps proceeding to Bir el Nuss, nineteen miles east of the Canal. Turkish activity in southern Palestine was increasing, but the possibility of a serious advance upon Egypt before the hot weather now seemed slight. The Russians were fighting well; they had advanced down the southern slopes of the Caucasus, had captured Erzerum on February 16th, and were imposing a heavy drain on Turkey's armies. Cabling to Murray on February 28th, Lord Kitchener said: "Events in the Caucasus and at Kermanshah have reduced considerably the forces which I consider the Turks can assemble for an attack on Egypt before the summer." The War Office advised that from Bozanti to Sinai there were then seven Turkish divisions, and some 38,000 troops in Palestine and

the Palestine-Sinai district. The grand total would not exceed 100,000. "Even using the railway to Beersheba it is unlikely that more than 100,000 could be used against Egypt by the middle of March. Considering the embarrassment of Turkey, the possibility of an attack becomes daily less probable." In reply to Murray's expression of opinion that both Katia and El Arish should be occupied as soon as practicable, the War Office said: "Occupy Katia if you think it desirable. El Arish is a doubtful matter, and decision about it should be postponed until you are established in Katia." At that time Murray was urging that the troops in Egypt should not be further reduced until the cool weather was past; and he advised the Government that, in addition to his mounted troops, he ought to be left three divisions of infantry for the defence of the Canal in the summer, with another division for Katia, and still another if he was to advance on El Arish.

Meanwhile the British leader was obliged to devote much attention to the situation in Egypt. The successes against the Senussi, and the appearance in the Delta at that time of such great British forces, had a steadying effect upon the Nationalists. But, as Murray knew, the country was then, as it was throughout the war, alive with seditious spirit. Moreover, the division of responsibility between Murray and Maxwell was not working satisfactorily, and during March Maxwell left Egypt for London while Murray assumed command of the troops on all Egyptian fronts. He was then responsible not only for the conduct of all operations from the Soudan to Salonika, but for the watching of Egypt internally, and the training and equipment of the great number of troops temporarily camped in Egypt but intended for other fronts. His task was huge and complex, and this should be remembered in considering his subsequent work in Sinai and Palestine.

On April 7th a mounted brigade, afterwards known as the 5th Mounted Brigade (British Yeomanry), was ordered out to Romani, twenty-three miles east of the Canal, under the command of Brigadier-General E. A. Wiggin,² with instruc-

² Brig.-Gen. E. A. Wiggin, D.S.O. Officer of British Regular Army; of Warwick, Eng.; b. Harborne, near Birmingham, Eng., 26 Nov., 1867.

tions to patrol and hold the main wells of the oasis area to the east and the south. At the same time Murray initiated vigorous steps to make the British possession of the area sound and permanent. The broad-gauge railway from Kantara, on the Canal, towards Romani was now being vigorously pushed forward. He hoped the railway would reach Katia, five miles east of Romani, early in April, and he informed the War Office that he then expected to have one mounted division and one infantry division based on rail-head. This advance of the yeomanry marked the opening of the Sinai campaign—an enterprise which, although strictly defensive until after the Battle of Romani in August, 1916, was then developed to the offensive which, prolonged until October, 1918, terminated at Aleppo at the junction of the Baghdad and Palestine railways, and gave to British arms complete possession of Sinai, Palestine, and Syria.

CHAPTER V

ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION

DIVIDED into three squadrons, each of six troops, a light horse regiment at war establishment is made up of 25 officers and 497 men. Of these, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades served complete upon Gallipoli, but the 4th Brigade was broken up upon arrival in Egypt. The 4th and 13th Regiments fought upon the Peninsula, but the 11th and 12th were disbanded, and were employed as reinforcements to other light horse units there.

On their return to Egypt most of the regiments went direct from the transports to their horse-lines. There the men handed in their infantry packs, were given back their riding gear, and jingled very happily again in their spurs. During their absence in Gallipoli their horses had been to a large extent in the care of a body of public-spirited Australians, most of them well advanced in middle age, who, being refused as too old for active service, had enlisted and gone to Egypt as grooms in the light horsemen's absence. Many of these men afterwards found employment in the remount dépôts, and continued their useful service till the end of the war.

All the regiments were much reduced in numbers, but the camps in Egypt then held abundant reinforcements, and a few weeks later eleven of the twelve regiments which afterwards served in Sinai and Palestine were at full strength. The 4th Regiment was reduced to two squadrons, one of which, together with the whole of the 13th Regiment, was sent as corps mounted troops to France, while the remaining squadron was for a time attached to an Imperial Service brigade doing special patrol duty against Turkish spies and agents upon the Egyptian side of the Canal. The 11th (Queensland and South Australia) and 12th (New South Wales) Regiments served until early in 1917 as detached units.

Scattered over a number of camps, most of them on the desert fringe of the Delta cultivation, the light horsemen presented a marked contrast to the raw regiments which had been assembled there twelve months before. More than half of them were now war veterans, trained in an exacting

and deadly school. In the Peninsula they had engaged in every form of modern infantry fighting. They had lived for months in trenches only a few yards from their enemy; they had learned patience in a prolonged defensive; they had engaged in some of the most hopeless offensives ever imposed upon storm-troops; their discipline had been tested in the sensitive and brilliant work of the Evacuation, and as marksmen they had become one of the most expert forces in the world. They were now all masters of their craft as fighters on foot, and had very little to learn in the mounted side of their work. Naturally these qualities had a remarkable effect upon the reinforcements which now filled the gaps in their lines. The new men introduced fresh life and enthusiasm into the regiments, and spirits were further stimulated by renewed association with the horses; on the other hand the knowledge of the veterans was quickly assimilated by the recruits, who now had a regimental tradition to sustain, and if possible to enhance. Moreover, almost all the officers were Gallipoli men, and with rare exceptions they enjoyed the complete confidence of their troops. Already on the Peninsula the Australian Imperial Force had practised that fine policy of promotion by sheer merit which, as the war continued, gave the men leaders whose average quality ranked remarkably high. Officers who failed were relieved of their front-line commands with a firmness scarcely to be expected in a young citizen army. From Gallipoli onward, neither social or political influence, nor considerations of personal friendship, played a sinister part in the selection or advancement of leaders. The result was a degree of efficiency not excelled in any force engaged in the war.

After their heavy work upon the Peninsula all troops perhaps expected a brief rest in Egypt. But mounted men were urgently needed for the defence of the Delta against the Senussi, the marauding tribesmen of the desert west of Lower Egypt, who were then threatening an attack. The 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, under Brigadier-General C. F. Cox,¹ arrived at Heliopolis on December 28th, and was at

¹ Maj.-Gen. C. F. Cox, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 1st L.H. Bde. 1915/18. Member of Australian Senate; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. Dundas, near Parramatta, 2 May, 1863.

once ordered to draw horses and mounted equipment, and be ready to march out, if possible, in forty-eight hours. The response of the three regiments, worn and exhausted as they were, was characteristic of the spirit which distinguished light horsemen throughout all their campaigning. They had come back from Gallipoli ignorant as to their future, and, while they would cheerfully have continued in the war as infantrymen, they prayed for service with their horses. They therefore received orders for mounted work with expressions of delight, and eagerly sought their old friends on the horse-lines. The horses were quickly shod, new clothing was issued, and "the Gallipoli stoop of the men changed into the old swing of the cavalryman." On December 31st, three days after their return, the 3rd Regiment (South Australia and Tasmania) under Lieutenant-Colonel D. Fulton² marched out for Wady Natrun, an oasis area on the desert forty miles north-west of Cairo; the 1st Regiment (New South Wales) under Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. Meredith³ and the 2nd (Queensland) under Lieutenant-Colonel T. W. Glasgow⁴ followed a fortnight later.

Scattered forces of the Senussi were reported to be moving towards Wady Natrun with designs on the Kataba Canal, further east, which supplies Alexandria with water. As this canal was ten feet above the level of the Nile, it might easily have been breached with damaging effect by raiders. With orders to maintain a barrier between the tribes of the desert and the native population along the Nile, Cox's brigade remained at the oasis for upwards of a month. The enemy did not appear, and the regiments, when not engaged upon patrol, were given a "refresher" course of mounted training. The winter days on the desert were ideal; but the nights were bitterly cold, and, as usual in Egypt, fuel was scarce. The concern of the light horse officers for their men was conspicuous throughout the war, and was a strong factor in

² Lieut.-Col. D. Fulton, C.M.G., C.B.E. Commanded 3rd L.H. Regt. 1915/17; commandant A.I.F. Headquarters, Egypt, 1917/18, 1919/20. Estate agent; b. North Adelaide, S. Aust., 1 Aug., 1882.

³ Brig.-Gen. J. B. Meredith, D.S.O. Commanded 4th L.H. Bde. 1917. Of Raymond Terrace, N.S.W.; b. Derrylough, Rosenallis, Queen's Co., Ireland, 11 Nov., 1864.

⁴ Maj.-Gen. Hon. Sir William Glasgow, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 1st Aust. Divn., 1918; member of Aust. Senate, 1919/32; Minister for Home and Territories, 1926/27, for Defence, 1927/29. Grazier; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Upton Bank, Mary River, near Tiara, Q'land, 6 June, 1876.



GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD MURRAY, COMMANDER OF THE
1st E.I., 1910-17

Photo by The Autotype Fine Art Company London



LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR CHARLES M. DORELL,
COMMANDER OF THE EASTERN FORCE, E.E.I., 1916-17

Photo by J. Russell & Sons, London



LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR HARRY CHAUVEL, COMMANDER OF THE AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL
FORCE IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE AND OF THE DESERT MOUNTED CORPS.

And 14 as Museum Official Photo No F1485.

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the efficiency of the force. At this time they gave their issue of firewood to the troopers, and bought kerosene-cookers for use in their messes.

On February 11th the brigade, less the 3rd Regiment, was removed by rail to the south-western "front," some 140 miles up the Nile from Cairo, with headquarters at Minia. At this time the desert tribes were menacing the peaceful irrigated settlement of the Upper Delta from the west, and British troops were scattered over many hundreds of miles along the river. Cox's brigade patrolled a line south of Fashn, some 250 miles in length, and remained there until May. The work was purely defensive; no effort was made to seek the enemy in the desert, and as the Senussi did not come in, the squadrons had a quiet if an arduous time. The posts were many miles apart, and to maintain contact the men had to be kept for long hours in the saddle. As the summer approached, the heat became severe upon the horses and their riders, and the khamsin season, with its strong dust-laden winds, was one of excessive discomfort. But after the confined hardship of Gallipoli, the light horsemen regarded their spell upon the Upper Nile in the light of a holiday. Their camps and routes of patrol lay along the margin of the irrigated valley, and the men enjoyed full rations of fresh produce. The unwarlike natives, and especially the Christian Copts, looked upon them as defenders against the fierce raiders of the desert, and treated them with kindness and hospitality. When the time came for their withdrawal the villagers expressed sharp regret. "Our children," said an influential Arab, "will remember the Australians in their prayers." Early in May the brigade was moved by rail to Kantara, on the Suez Canal, and took its place in Anzac Mounted Division. Cox, whose health was indifferent, was given leave to England. Lieutenant-Colonel Meredith took over the command of the brigade, and Major C. H. Granville⁵ succeeded to the leadership of the 1st Regiment.

The Anzac Mounted Division was formed early in March and on March 16th Major-General H. G. Chauvel was

⁵ Lieut. Col. C. H. Granville, D.S.O. Commanded 1st L.H. Regt., 1916/19, and 1st L.H. Bde. for short periods in 1916 and 1918. Of West Maitland, N.S.W.; b. Wales, 26 Jan., 1877.

appointed to its command. The new formation, which was to achieve results unequalled by any other division of horse, Allied or enemy, engaged on any front in the war, was at the outset composed of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade. At a later date the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade was withdrawn from the division, which during the rest of the campaign, except on a few occasions, was composed of the remaining three brigades. With the birth of the division there commenced the long association of the mounted men of Australia and New Zealand, an association which, strengthened by increasing reciprocal admiration and affection in the course of two and a half years of harsh and often bloody campaigning, must ever stand as an intimate bond between the two young Dominions.

The New Zealand Brigade, like the light horsemen, had served and shone upon Gallipoli. Its men, made up of the Auckland, Canterbury, and Wellington Regiments, possessed many of the qualities of the light horsemen, and some distinctively their own. Like the Australians, they were all pioneers, or the children of pioneers, born to and practised in country life, natural horsemen and expert riflemen. Closer in physical type than the Australians to the big men of England's northern counties and to the Lowland Scotch, they perhaps lacked something of the almost aggressive independence of thought and individuality of action which marked the Australians. They represented in fact a younger dominion than the Australians; they were more closely, although not more purely, bred to the parent British stock, more "colonial" and less "national" in their outlook than their Australian comrades in the division. But, if the two bodies of young men presented interesting differences, mental and physical, they were almost indistinguishable as fighters. All the qualities which their countrymen rejoiced to find in the Australians were to be found in the New Zealanders, with the exception of little incidental excellences which sidelights disclosed on either side. The New Zealand Brigade not only won much glory for its people; it reflected everlasting credit upon the great business qualities of the New Zealand Government during the war. Not only in its fighting capacity, but

in its administration and economy, it was a model of what a mounted brigade should be; and Australian light horse officers of distinction were frequently heard to declare that the finest mounted brigade engaged in Sinai and Palestine was this splendid little body of New Zealanders. Between the Australians and the New Zealanders there was never in the long campaign a thought of jealousy or a moment of misunderstanding. Each trusted and swore by the other.

The Anzac Mounted Division was from the day of its origin on the desert very fortunate in its leadership. General Chauvel, as temporary commander of the 1st Australian Infantry Division on the Peninsula, had already displayed qualities which marked him as a sound administrator and a wise and far-seeing commander. Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Browne,^a his chief staff officer, an Australian native but a professional soldier of the British Army, had served in South Africa, and in 1914 was on the staff with Allenby's cavalry during the retreat from Mons. Without exception the rest of the staff officers were men who had displayed marked ability in Gallipoli. Chauvel's care and success in selecting his staff were proved, as the campaign progressed, by the fact that practically every officer on it rose rapidly and won distinction. The brigade staffs were almost wholly officers tried in the Peninsula; so, too, were the leaders of the regiments and squadrons; many of them, perhaps a majority, wore South African ribbons.

When, therefore, on 16th March, 1916, Chauvel hoisted his pennant at Anzac Mounted Division Headquarters at Serapeum, he must have regarded the future with much satisfaction. Almost every officer and non-commissioned officer, and more than half his men, had been through the trial of Anzac as infantry. The whole division was bursting with enthusiasm for a mounted campaign unconfined by trenches and barbed wire. Most important of all, perhaps, his men knew their prospective enemy. They had probed and discovered the Turk's weakness and strength. They knew his straight shooting, his efficiency with the bomb rather than with the bayonet, his grim tenacity in defence, his fortitude

^a Brig-Gen J. G. Browne, C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army, of Adelaide, S. Aust; b. Mitcham, near Adelaide, 26 July, 1878.

under punishment, his capacity to make sound warfare under the harshest conditions and to endure on rations which would starve and destroy Western troops. They knew also his lack of personal initiative and his feebleness as an individual fighter in the open. Every Australian and New Zealander respected the Turk as a soldier; but every trooper felt his man-to-man superiority over the enemy; and that consciousness, natural to men of a superior race, endured throughout the campaign. "The light horseman," said an experienced Australian officer during the campaign, "looks upon the Turk as a superior nigger."

Chauvel, then, was well pleased with his division. But none of his staff officers would have guessed it. This remarkable Australian professional soldier, who was destined to become the greatest leader of horse in modern times, was one of the most imperturbable cavalymen who ever crossed a saddle. No temporary failure depressed him; no victory, however sweeping and decisive, excited him. He appeared on service as an almost anomalous product of a young country, where reserve is not nearly so marked in the individual man as it is in the older lands of the north. Harry George Chauvel was born in 1865 on a cattle station owned by his grandfather, a retired Indian army officer, at Tabulam, on the Clarence River in New South Wales; he was therefore forty-nine years old at the outbreak of war. Like all Australian country boys, the future cavalry leader was from his infancy associated with horses, and in the rough timbered ranges acquired that easy mastery of country which was always conspicuous in his control of operations. The fact that at Toowoomba and at the Sydney Grammar School he was not conspicuous as a scholar, was due perhaps to his thoughts running on sports rather than on studies. Small and light for his years and, even as a boy, a finished horseman, he was sought as a jockey at picnic or amateur race meetings in Queensland and New South Wales, where he rode with much success. From sport to soldiering is but a narrow step, and young Chauvel very early decided for himself upon a military career. Always an eager reader, he rejoiced in stories of battle; and one day at Damascus, almost at the end of the great cavalry drive which had given Pales-

tine and Syria to British arms, he confessed that the two historical heroes of his boyhood were Saladin and Stuart, the great cavalryman of the American Civil War. "I never thought in those days," he remarked, "that I should take part in a cavalry operation greater than anything undertaken by them."

Chauvel served as a volunteer in the South Africa campaign, first with the Queensland Mounted Infantry, and later as the commander of a composite mounted force which included Queensland, British, Canadian, and South African horsemen. Unlike many professional soldiers of distinction, he was always a leader of broad Imperial sympathies and infinite tact; and he displayed in that South African command, early in his career, the very rare capacity he had for handling men recruited from many lands and divided by striking differences of temperament and outlook. To this quality he owed his elevation later in Palestine to the command of Desert Mounted Corps, where, as the leader of a force of Australians and New Zealanders, British yeomanry, and Indian cavalry, he directed with complete success, and always without any apparent effort, one of the most complex and difficult corps commands to be assembled in warfare.

When war was declared, Colonel Chauvel was at sea, on the way to London to act as Australia's representative on the Imperial General Staff at the War Office. On his arrival he asked at once for employment in France, but was informed of Australia's intention to recruit and send oversea a division of infantry and a light horse brigade, and told that he was required to command the mounted force. Chauvel joined the 1st Light Horse Brigade immediately after its arrival in Egypt, and, after directing its training, landed with his three regiments in Gallipoli in May, 1915. Anzac gave limited opportunities to generals, but it was nevertheless a severe test of leadership. The successful commanders were those who convinced the troops whom they led of their personal courage, their knowledge of their sector, their sense of the enemy, and their qualities as men. In that cramped area brigadiers and their troops lived close together. The men learned to know their officers very intimately, and an indifferent soldier or an unconvincing personality was quickly disclosed. Chauvel served

with honour as a brigadier, and on the 6th of November, 1915, was promoted to the temporary command of the 1st Australian Infantry Division. He left the Peninsula with a reputation as a shrewd, safe leader, who had made the most of restricted possibilities. Birdwood was quick to appreciate his wide and intimate knowledge of tactics and the sound sure touch with which he applied that knowledge to actual warfare, and it was proposed that he should proceed with the infantry to France. But Chauvel shared with his light horsemen their strong desire for mounted action; and, when it was decided to leave Australia's mounted regiments in Egypt, he elected, in a happy moment for his career and for British fortunes in the Near East, to remain and lead them.

Reserved and aloof in manner, gentle of speech and quiet of bearing, Chauvel won favour with the men of Anzac by his quality as a soldier rather than by his personal parts. He was not one of those leaders who went down among the men and gained their affection by active and sympathetic participation in their every-day lives. His aloofness did not mean that he was opposed to such conduct. He could not have done it if he had tried; he was far too shy. A keen but a very just disciplinarian, his manner was genial to officers and men with whom he came in contact; but he was incapable of seeking popularity either for self-gratification or for the legitimate purpose of stimulating in his troops a personal regard for their leader. Like many great military leaders who went before him, he was the sure far-seeing brain, rather than the spirit of his force. And so even in the great cavalry days ahead, when his huge corps of horsemen was rolling up the Turkish armies in Palestine, and victory was succeeding victory with the certainty of sunrises, he was never a hero to the light horsemen. Great leader as he became, he missed by his instinctive reserve the satisfaction of becoming a soldier's idol.

This was the more remarkable because Chauvel was a cavalryman. In the mounted service there is more hero-worship than in infantry. Most of the world's great captains of horse have won their fame by the exercise at the critical moment of what is known as the cavalry instinct. They have been masterful, dramatic figures, who have leaped into

fame by a brilliant stroke at the decisive time, seizing upon a fleeting opportunity to smash in with their horse and turn the fortunes of a hard-fought battle. Chauvel did so with his light horsemen at Beersheba. But that was after he had won his way to the greatest cavalry command of modern times. He was never an arresting, picturesque figure. There is no record in the whole of the Palestine war of him or any other general riding down a mass of Turks, sword in hand, at the head of his men. He earned his command by far-seeing and perfect preparation and exact execution rather than by inspired flashes of genius in times of crisis. Chauvel was no hard-riding gambler against odds. Like Alva, he could on occasion ignore the ardent enthusiasm of his officers and bide his time. Always cool, and looking far enough ahead to see the importance of any particular fight in its proper relation to the war as a whole, he was brave enough to break off an engagement if it promised victory only at what he considered an excessive cost to his men and horses. He fought to win, but not at any price. He sought victory on his own terms. He always retained, even in heated moments of battle, when leaders are often careless of life, a very rare concern for the lives of his men and his horses.

Chauvel's appreciation of the true purpose of mounted riflemen was illustrated again and again in his command of the light horse. In scouting, patrol, and reconnaissance, the functions of mounted riflemen are identical with those of cavalry, but in action their work is quite dissimilar. When engaged in actual operations, they are infantrymen made highly mobile by their horses. They are thrusters and raiders; they are intended for swift surprise work on the flanks rather than for frontal attack. Their mission is by bold reconnaissance to screen preparation and the advance in battle, daringly to probe and discover the enemy's strength and intentions, constantly to keep him uneasy as to his flanks—and all the while prepared to swoop down on an exposed enemy position, or by long night-rides to surround and destroy his isolated posts. Their superior merit as dismounted fighters lies in the speed of their approach to an enemy force or stronghold, and—as they have not been exhausted, like infantry, by long marches under burdensome

packs and arms and munitions—in the freshness, vigour, and rapidity of their subsequent advance on foot. This mobility gives them strong chances of frequently surprising and overwhelming enemy forces greatly superior to their own. The light horsemen were usually outnumbered in their fights in Sinai and Palestine. Such enterprises have their obvious risk. If the enemy in a selected position survives the first onslaught of his swift-striking assailants, he has a sound opportunity, if the attack is persisted in, of destroying most of the mounted infantry force. And mounted men in warfare are, with their horses, slower to train and more difficult to replace than ordinary infantry. Had the Anzac Mounted Division, for instance, been disabled in the early days of the Sinai campaign, it is extremely doubtful if Palestine would have fallen to British arms.

Chauvel never lost sight of these elementary principles in the employment of his mounted rifles; and it is to be remembered that, for more than a year after the crossing of the Canal, true cavalry, as distinct from mounted rifles, played little or no part in the campaign. His disposition was to make all possible use of his force, but never to risk its extinction except, of course, when fighting on the defensive, as at Romani. He was a leader of infinite patience. A deep student of military history, he was never in a hurry to win expensively to-day that which could be won cheaply to-morrow. In the bold aggressive ranks of cavalymen such a policy was at times certain to be challenged by criticism; Chauvel's justification lies not only in the magnitude of the results achieved by his mounted forces in the campaign, but in the trifling battle casualties which his victorious horsemen suffered.

The Australian light horse leaders were rich in their contrasts. Charles Frederick Cox, who led the 1st Brigade in succession to Chauvel, was as impulsive and fiery as Chauvel was constructive and calm. Cox, like Chauvel, took to soldiering for the love of it; but, while Chauvel was a professional, he was an amateur. Born at Parramatta in 1863, he entered as a young man the clerical service of the Government railways, but was destined to spend only intermittent periods at his desk. When still a lad he enlisted as a trooper in the New

South Wales Lancers, was commissioned in 1894, and became a captain in 1897. In 1899 it was decided by the New South Wales Government to send a hundred chosen lancers to Aldershot for a special course of training, and young Cox was entrusted with the command. Soon after he reached England war broke out in South Africa; Cox and his troopers volunteered their services, and were immediately accepted. England was stirred at the fine response of the Australian visitors, and, when Cox and his men rode through the streets of London prior to embarkation for Africa, they received a great ovation from its populace. They were the first Australian mounted troops with a war mission to be seen in the old city, and the heart of the Londoner was keenly touched. Joining up with other New South Wales troops in South Africa, Cox soon won notice for his strong personal hold upon his men and for his native dash in action. Fighting in Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and was given command of the 3rd New South Wales Mounted Rifles.

Standing well over six feet, handsome and well-proportioned, Cox looks what he is, a very spirited cavalryman. He is by intuition a master of cavalry rather than a leader of mounted riflemen. He is in action a man of instant intuitive resolve and swift tempestuous action. He won his "C.B." in South Africa—a rare decoration for a major, as he then was—by an inspired decision to lead his men at the gallop round the flank and across the rear of a greatly superior force of Boers who were seriously threatening a British infantry position. His dramatic move unnerved and broke the enemy, who fled in disorder. The action was characteristic of the man, and was repeated in more than one fight in Palestine.

"Fighting Charlie," as he was known after South Africa, had never been a deep student of war. He relied upon his native wit and his common sense rather than upon the text-books. He could not claim, like Granville Ryrie, to be an outstanding example of the Australian bushman. In the field, except in actual operations, he left the conduct of his brigade almost entirely in the hands of his staff, although there was never any doubt as to who was in fact, and in the

hearts and minds of his men, the leader of his force. But, if Cox left much to his brigade staff and to his regimental officers, he in more than one crisis in Palestine took hold of his force with the grasp of the real leader, and turned a critical fight into sudden complete victory. These flashes were apparently so unpremeditated and so daring that critics feared Cox would one day sustain a bad failure. But both in South Africa and in Palestine his instinct, moving in the thick of battle, was always sound, and gave him a sure, strong grip on the confidence and affection of his brigade.

Of all our Australian leaders disclosed by the war, perhaps none stands level with Granville de Laune Rylie, of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, as a true representative of the Australian countryside. He was a distinguished soldier, and was active in Australian public life at home. But above anything else, he was a great Australian bushman. Born in 1865 on his father's station at Michelago, in New South Wales, he was educated at King's School, Parramatta. But his thoughts as a boy probably never ran very seriously upon schooling. His heart was in the bush; before he was out of knickerbockers he had already shown exceptional skill in all youthful country pursuits. Like Cox, he was not a deep student of military affairs. The qualities which marked him as a fine soldier were acquired as a lad on the wild, fresh countryside. Despite his great weight, he was one of the most perfect horsemen in Palestine; and on the rifle ranges in the field where the men practised, he often showed himself one of the best shots in his brigade.

His knowledge of his men was unequalled by that of any other light horse leader; so also was his knowledge of horses, and in his sense of country and his appreciation of the strength of enemy positions, he rivalled Chauvel. And in all these qualities, invaluable in the leader of mounted men in the field, he was relying not upon the lessons of the military textbooks, but upon his training as a bushman. When Rylie first stood for Parliament, he went round the electorate entertaining his audiences with a programme of rollicking ballads sung to his own accompaniment on a piano, a concertina, or any other musical instrument available. He was then, as he is now in 1922, capable of effective, bluff speech,

marked by refreshing humour, courage, and common sense. But Ryrie knew his country people and what they liked; and he was victorious at the polls. Extraordinarily versatile, he could throw and treat a sick horse in the field as cleanly and effectively as most veterinary officers; he could rival the most expert aborigine in the use of the boomerang; as a young man he fought twice in the final round for the amateur heavy-weight boxing championship of Australia; and even at fifty-five, in the field, few men would have been pleased to enter the ring against him.

Squarely and massively built, Ryrie weighed above sixteen stone. But, although the heaviest man in the light horse, he perhaps for his weight rode lighter than any man in Palestine. His favourite charger, "Plain Bill," an Australian thoroughbred, which had known steeplechasing days before the war, was the most coveted horse among all the 30,000 animals that finally made up the Desert Mounted Corps command. Such a man, provided he was a good soldier, could scarcely fail to be a hero to his men. And Ryrie had many great qualities as a soldier. He had not the occasional brilliance of Cox, nor did he pretend to the profound knowledge of the art of mounted warfare possessed by Chauvel. But he was, nevertheless, a rare leader of a mounted brigade. Pre-eminent in common sense, he was above all a sound man. No leader in Palestine had a shrewder grasp of possibilities, both British and enemy; and because of this he went right through the campaign from the Canal—where, at the beginning, he led the light horse vanguard—to the armistice without once making a serious mistake—an uncommon record for a leader of a sensitive, daring force in a campaign of two and a half years' constant fighting. Steady, consistent success marked his leadership all the way. And, apart from his military gifts, Ryrie was a great moral force to the Australians in Palestine. His wide human sympathy, his excellence in all physical exercise despite his weight and age, his unaffected indifference to the hottest fire, his close personal acquaintance with many hundreds of individual men, his keen humour and great talent as a story-teller, and, above all, his deep sense of duty and devotion to the cause for which he was fighting, and his determination to live as his troopers lived, sharing

their rough rations and their hardships—all these things made him a personal force for good which extended far beyond his own brigade. Ryrie had been sometimes described as a careless disciplinarian—he was certainly more indulgent towards his troopers than other Australian brigadiers. But no leader on the front could count more assuredly upon the discipline of his force in action. He was, in the camp and in action, the trusted father of his men.

When Chauvel established his headquarters at Serapeum, the Anzac Mounted Division was attached to the I Anzac Corps, which was then holding No. 2 Section—or the central sector—of the Canal Defences. On March 15th the division relieved the 1st Australian Infantry Division in the front line, where the 3rd Light Horse Brigade had already been for some time. While the new formation was still far from complete in its equipment, it became urgently needed to reinforce the 5th Yeomanry Brigade at Romani, and the work of making it ready for the field was therefore vigorously pushed forward. The men from Anzac had been rested and refreshed; the reinforcements were learning readily from their experienced camp-fellows; spirits were high, and all ranks were eager for the order to follow the yeomanry eastwards.

Australia did not provide artillery for its mounted brigades, and Chauvel was now furnished with Territorial batteries of the British Royal Horse Artillery. The Leicester Battery was attached to the 1st Light Horse Brigade, the Ayrshire to the 2nd, the Inverness to the 3rd, and the Somerset to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade. These Territorial gunners from the outset displayed a high standard of efficiency. Their work throughout the campaign was distinguished by bold driving and straight shooting, and very soon there were established between them and the mounted men from Australia and New Zealand strong and warm ties of friendship. In a hundred fights they proved gallant and dependable allies of the light horsemen.

A reconnaissance to Wady um Muksheib on March 21st provided the light horsemen with their first little mounted enterprise into Sinai. The enemy, as we have seen, had come by the Muksheib route in his attack on the Canal early in 1915, and during the year there had been reports of Turkish

working parties improving the water-supply in the wady, with a view to future operations. Except near the Katia oasis area, the British line east of the Canal was protected by a desert zone practically devoid of natural water, and it was obvious policy to guard against the enemy increasing the supply by well-sinking and other artificial means. If this could be done, the Turk would be restricted in his advance to the old Darb el Sultani route in the north, by way of Katia, and the British campaign thus confined to a definite frontage.

A party from the 8th Light Horse Regiment (Victoria) under Captain A. E. Wearne,⁷ supported by other details, bringing the strength up to fifteen officers and ninety-four men, was detailed for the reconnaissance. Wearne was to seek information as to the water-supply at Moiya Harab and El Hassif, close to where the Wady um Muksheib, after coming down from the central highlands of Sinai, loses itself in the sands of the desert, report upon some slight enemy works in the neighbourhood, and spy out the land generally. The result proved to be of trifling importance. Water was found in a number of cisterns in the Muksheib, and the enemy works were reported to be old and deserted. But many useful lessons were learned. The column traversed eighty miles of sheer desert in thirty-seven hours, including halts. The men and horses finished fresh and strong; but the pace set was excessive for the camels, although they were a selected lot, and they were greatly exhausted on the return to railhead.

This was the first triumph of the Australian horse over the camel in desert warfare. The camels had been taken to carry water for the horses, a provision which later in the campaign, when the endurance of the horses became better known, would not have been deemed necessary. Without the camels the horses would have travelled much faster, and even thirty-seven hours without water would not have distressed them. The Australians observed for the first time the amazing stamina of the native camel-drivers, who walked the full eighty miles dragging their camels, which always hung back at the end of their ropes, after them. They realised, also, how destitute was Sinai of sustenance for man-

⁷ Maj. A. E. Wearne, M.C. 8th L.H. Regt. Reuter's correspondent, Peking; of Liverpool, N.S.W.; b Liverpool, 5 Aug., 1871.

kind. As they approached the foot-hills of the central range, they came upon country with a sparse supply of rough grazing for camels, and startled a few gazelle and hares of some small variety. There, too, they found a camel-herd in charge of a few camels, a wretched native "unusually dense and stupid," who was "terrified when taken into camp," but whose fears disappeared under kindly treatment. "He ate biscuits given to him by the troopers," said Wearne in his report, "to an extent far beyond the capacity of ordinary mankind." His abnormal hunger was explained by his declaration that for two months he had lived, like the old Sinai sheikh met by Kinglake, entirely on camel milk.

Upon this expedition commenced the long and profitable work of the air force with the light horsemen. Airmen preceded the column and advised Wearne that all was clear ahead, so saving the horsemen much exhausting work in scouting. This association between the two services, continued throughout the campaign, brought about a striking increase in the speed and effectiveness of mounted troops. Then, and on countless occasions afterwards, cavalry forces with airmen as advance-guards were able to travel swiftly and without fear over unknown enemy country towards their objective, instead of being compelled to probe their way slowly and laboriously mile by mile, as in the days before flying. The column also used wireless, carried on camels, to keep in touch with division. The latest achievements in science and mechanism were operating in the war in old Sinai as they were in France and Flanders.

Early in April Chauvel shifted his headquarters from Serapeum to Salhia, nineteen miles west of Kantara, taking with him the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealand Mounted Brigade, in order to complete preparations for the advance into the Katia area, which was planned for May. It was at Salhia that Napoleon more than a century earlier had concentrated his army for his dash across Sinai. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade remained in the line east of the Canal, and the 1st Brigade was still patrolling in southern Egypt.

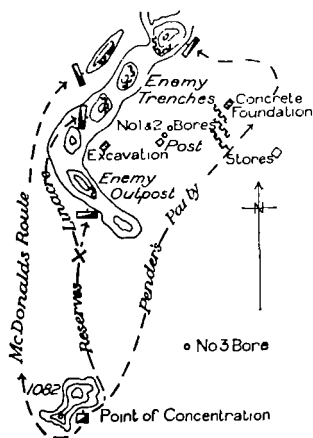
The Victorians of the 8th Regiment had had the honour of the pioneer enterprise to the Muksheib, and a few men of the same regiment were associated with a slightly more serious

mission to Jifjafa early in April. The British airmen, who were daily becoming more active and venturesome, reported the existence of a small Turkish force at Jifjafa, a post situated in the Sinai Range at an altitude of about 1,000 feet, some fifty-two miles east of the Canal. Major W. H. Scott^a was ordered to proceed with a squadron of the 9th Light Horse Regiment (South Australia and Victoria), under Captain Wearne, to capture the position, destroy the well-sinking machinery on which the enemy was reported to be working, and observe the country generally. Scott had, after allowing for the horseholders, about ninety rifles available for action, in addition to thirty-two officers and men from the Australian and Royal Engineers and the Army Medical Corps; but, when his column was complete with transport camels and their native Bikaner escort, it included no less than 320 officers and men, 175 horses, and 261 camels. This fact, unimportant in itself, is an indication of the transport entailed by an advance into the desert. The actual fighting was simple; the difficult problem confronting the Commander-in-Chief was supplies.

The light horse, fighting as mounted troops, first drew blood upon the Jifjafa raid. Scott moved out from the Canal defences on the afternoon of April 11th, and bivouacked that night in the Wady um Muksheib. The desert of central Sinai is sandy only in patches—much of the country provides firm ground for horses—and on this march the Australian waler began to show his superior pace as a walker, an invaluable campaigning quality in which he was always superior to horses from England and other countries. Preceded and advised by aircraft, Scott travelled by rapid marches up the firm, dry bed of the Muksheib for several miles, and then struck north-north-east along a branch wady towards Jifjafa to his final bivouac before action, a point about eight miles from the enemy post, which he reached at half-past two on the morning of the 13th. The airmen had reported that the little Turkish force usually retired to the hills during their reconnaissance in the mornings, and returned later to their camp. Scott therefore waited until the morning was well advanced before making his attack.

^a Brigadier W. H. Scott, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 9th L.H. Regt., 1916/19. Consulting Engineer, of Wangaratta, Vic.; b. Oamaru, N.Z., 11 Apr., 1881.

Very little fighting attended the capture of the post, but Jifjafa provides a pretty, if a slight, example of light horse work. Moving from cover, Major Scott ordered one troop, under Lieutenant J. M. McDonald,⁹ to ride as rapidly as the broken ground would permit round the west and north of the hill 1082, and to occupy ground on a ridge about a mile north-west of the supposed position of the enemy camp. A second troop moved north-east past the enemy's works on the south, while a third troop, under Lieutenant F. J. Linacre,¹⁰ made the frontal attack. Four men and the machine-gun section were held in reserve. As Linacre approached



the first enemy outpost, it was seen that McDonald would be a little late in his envelopment on the left. Linacre was then swung with sixteen men over the ridge slightly to the north of the enemy, and the remaining men and the slender reserve marched direct on to the post. When the Australians came into view the Turks bolted, some to the hills and some towards the south-east. Those who made for the hills, finding themselves headed off by Lieutenant W. S. Pender,¹¹ took up a position and opened fire. The engagement was brief. The Australian riflemen speedily asserted fire superiority; six of the enemy were killed and five wounded, and the rest of the force, with the exception of two who escaped on camels, surrendered. The officer in charge was an Austrian engineer, whose party had been engaged in boring and well-making with a German military artesian plant. During the brief fighting the light horse suffered their first casualty in the campaign, Corporal Monaghan,¹² of the 8th Light Horse, being

⁹ Capt. J. M. McDonald, M.C., 9th L.H. Regt. Civil servant; b. Semaphore, S. Aust., 24 March, 1890.

¹⁰ Capt. F. J. Linacre, 9th L.H. Regt. Pearler; of Gisborne, Vic.; b. Carlton, Melb., Vic., 4 Feb., 1889. Died, 17 Jan., 1922.

¹¹ Col. W. S. Pender, C.I.E., M.B.E.; 9th L.H. Regt. (later Director of Farms, Indian Army). Farmer, of Minyip, Vic.; b. Rushworth, Vic., 18 Oct., 1889.

¹² Cpl. S. F. Monaghan (No. 976, 8th L.H. Regt.). Sawyer; of Prahran, Melbourne, Vic.; b. Derby, Tas., 1888. Killed in action, 13 Apr., 1916.



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR E. W. C. CHAYTOR (RIGHT), COMMANDER OF THE ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION, 1917-19, WITH BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. F. COX (LEFT), COMMANDER OF THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE, 1915-19



BRIGADIER-GENERAL G. B. L. RYRIE, COMMANDER OF THE 2ND AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE
1914-18, ON HIS HORSE, "PLAIN BILL"

Acct. II at Museum Official Photo No B1681

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killed. Scott, having demolished the plant, returned with his prisoners to the Canal. As the column retraversed the Muksheib, the wady came down in flood, the dirty brown waters, fed by a downpour rare in Sinai, spreading wide and shallow over the bed of the wild ravine. The light horse spent nearly a year in Sinai, but that was the only time they saw a running stream.

This raid, insignificant in itself, was very encouraging to General Murray. The Commander-in-Chief was well aware that success in Sinai depended almost entirely upon his mounted troops; he probably knew, even before a yeomanry brigade met with disaster in the oasis area, that the Australians and New Zealanders were the only horse which showed promise of early usefulness. Jifjafa demonstrated that the light horsemen were at home on the desert. Scott had led his little force for several days and nights over a wild route, most of which was quite unknown to him and his men; he had surprised and demolished the enemy at a slight cost to himself, gleaned much information about the cisterns of the Muksheib, and returned to his base almost precisely to his time-table. The troop-leaders had shown dash and resource, the co-operation with the airmen had worked admirably, and the men had displayed keenness, excellent horsemanship, very straight shooting, and perfect discipline. Murray expressed warm appreciation of the exploit, and was already satisfied that in the Anzac Mounted Division he had the beginning of a force of exceptional fitness for the irregular work ahead.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARABS

If the Allied failure at Gallipoli left the Turkish people elated and eager for conquest, they did not lack opportunity to demonstrate their fighting capacity. Heavily engaged in Mesopotamia and Transcaucasia, they were embarking upon a campaign of unknown magnitude towards Egypt, while already the Germans were demanding that they should assist the Central Powers in south-eastern Europe. And now, early in 1916, they were menaced by revolt in southern Arabia. The traditional attitude of Turkey towards the Arabs was drastically changed by the Young Turk Administration. Hitherto the Arabs had been governed loosely and gently, a policy due in part to their capacity to resist the measures of repression enforced against non-Turks in other parts of the Empire, and in part to the fact that they were Moslems and of the true faith. The Arabs, not only of Arabia proper, but of eastern and to a less extent of western Palestine, and even of Syria, were always more or less armed. They were migratory and elusive in their habits and, living in regions of comparative desert far removed from the seat of the Empire, were able to evade conscription and in a large measure to escape taxation. The old Turkish policy was to govern them, so far as they were governed, by the free employment of their own notables. These men, who exercised considerable tribal control, were relatively successful as Turkish tax-gatherers and administrators. They grew rich out of their share of all taxes, and the central government took the balance and was well content. But the Young Turks, in their mad dream of an empire purely Turkish in blood and speech, and obliged to find lucrative posts for those who were faithfully serving them, deprived many of the Arabs of Syria and Palestine of their official positions, and so antagonised the most influential men among the subject race. The passionate peoples of the Near East have a quick, childlike sense of injury. The bazaars of the cities rang with excited exaggerations of the outrage committed by the Young Turks; and the grievance,

speeding in that magical way common with all news in the country, was soon felt over the wide desert to the east and south.

Then came the Young Turk proclamation of a holy war. The Moslems of the Empire were besought and incited to persecute and massacre all Christians. The Arabs received the proclamation with indifference, and the special appeal made to the people of the Hejaz in southern Arabia was answered by Sherif Hussein with a fine touch of humour. Hussein, a well-informed man whose sons had considerable personal acquaintance with Europe, asked Talaat if the Germans were to be killed along with the rest of the Christians. Soon afterwards the Arabs of the Hejaz showed an active disposition to revolt, and on 1st March, 1916, Vice-Admiral R. E. Wemyss,¹ Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies and Egypt Naval Forces, advised General Murray that "there appears to be some promise of inducing Arab combination against the Turks in Arabia."

In this volume it is not proposed to describe in detail the progress of the Arab rising and subsequent campaign. But it will be desirable to trace it in broad outline, because of the important influence which it had upon the British conquest of Palestine and Syria. Hussein, believing that, in a rising against the Turks, he would be warmly backed by his people of the Hejaz, approached the British Government for assurance of support in gold and munitions. These negotiations introduced to the campaign the gallant band of Englishmen who afterwards played so influential and picturesque a part in the Arab war against the Turks. The young Englishman shows nowhere to such advantage against men of all other races as in the handling of coloured alien peoples. The personal hold gained in wild Arabia by a few British civilians and officers, unsupported by military force, was a rare tribute to their courage, tact, and ability. The British Government hampered their negotiations by a policy of indecision and delay; but finally the necessary guarantees of arms and money were given, and in June the Arabs of the Hejaz declared war against their Turkish rulers at Constantinople.

¹ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Wester Wemyss, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O. First Sea Lord, 1917/19. b. 12 April, 1864. Died, 24 May, 1933.

To understand the merits and shortcomings of the Arabs as fighters, it is necessary to be seized of their social and political conditions as the war found them. There was then no such thing as an Arab race bound together and stimulated by a common patriotism, or by any definite collective aim. Arabia was a sparsely peopled land, held by a large number of princedomes similar in blood and speech and religion, but each living its own intensely parochial life, and each divided again into many more or less independent tribes. These tribes were animated by no desire for nationhood or progress. The aim of each was to live as independently, as simply, and with as little manual labour as possible. An extremely primitive people, their lives were on the eve of the war much like those of their roaming forefathers before the first crossing of the Jordan. They asked only to be left alone by any authority or people beyond the boundaries of their tribe. They were passionately opposed to the restrictions of government: and, with all their traditional reputation for hospitality, perhaps no people in the world was at heart so antagonistic to the approach of the stranger. They wished for no Western innovations, no material development, no increase in industrial activity.

Among such a people it was as difficult for an ambitious prince like Hussein to promote a general rising against the Turks as it was for the Turks to bring about a holy war against all unbelievers. It was speedily discovered by the Hejaz leader and his British advisers that the tribes would not leave their districts and engage in a war of indefinite length at the prompting of an appeal to their nationalism. Something more definite and tangible must be offered. The Arab chiefs made this clear. They would, they said, under no terms promise troops to the Sherif for a campaign removed from their immediate homes. But if Hussein and his allies would pay them their price in rifles, munitions, and gold, and would bring the war to them, they would assist in the destruction of the Turks within the boundaries of their particular tribes. As nothing better offered, these terms were accepted. Hussein, and the British officers who were on special service with him, then evolved a scheme to make the most profitable use of the Arabs available for service. A few thousand Hejaz

Arabs, some of whom had served with the Turks, were enrolled and trained as a camel corps for prolonged service wherever they might be needed. These men, who in the course of the war reached a fair level of efficiency, were led by a few British officers and non-commissioned officers, assisted by Arabs of the nobler class. They were trained in the use of artillery and machine-guns, and became the nucleus and backbone of the miscellaneous Arabian army. They alone of the Hejaz force wore distinctive military uniform; and they were the only Arabs, with the exception of a few personal followers of the Emir Feisal, one of the sons of Hussein, to be engaged in the campaign all the way from the Hejaz to Damascus and beyond.

As the campaign developed, Hussein's influence—or rather the influence of English gold—travelled far, and in October, 1918, Hejaz men, supported by the local tribesmen, fought in the bazaars of Aleppo. Nevertheless the majority of the powerful principedoms stood aloof from the rising, and the actual combatants were drawn almost entirely from the Hejaz men of the south and the tribes which dwelt close to the long new pilgrims' railway which, running south from Damascus, skirts the western fringe of the Arabian desert.

The tribes which elected to fight with Hussein approximately observed the terms of their bargain. They received rifles and ammunition on a lavish scale from the British, and golden English sovereigns, unseen in Europe in those days, poured in a full and constant stream into the desert. The Arabs in return performed with more or less enthusiasm and capacity the tasks imposed upon them in their own districts. Raids on moving trains on the Hejaz railway and the annihilation of Turkish posts, with an occasional attack upon isolated Turkish columns, made up their part in the war. The usual procedure was for a British officer, accompanied perhaps by a very small force of the Arab regulars, to arrive with his plan of operations in the district belonging to a tribe; upon which the chief or chiefs who had promised co-operation would call up their fighting men.

As a rule, in these little engagements the Turks were greatly outnumbered. But they were, man for man, vastly superior to their rebellious subjects. The Arab of the desert, when

equipped for battle, is one of the most picturesque figures in the world. Armed with his modern rifle and great quantities of the ammunition which is so dear to his heart, he carries also a vicious little dagger and often a sword. His Arab horse is disappointing. In place of the noble steed of tradition, the modern animal is nearly always an ill-conditioned, scraggy pony, which receives very harsh treatment from its owner. But the shortcomings in the horse are more than balanced by the splendour of the man. Tall, straight, and spare, the modern Arab of the desert is one of the most beautiful physical examples of the human race. His large, dark, flashing eyes, his good features, his black, shining beard, are all impressive; but it is in his bold pride and grace of bearing that the Arab is in this as in every age without a peer. As a soldier he was one of the most useless and harmless individuals that have engaged in modern battle. Contrary to general belief, he was entirely without experience as a fighter. His tribal "wars" are mere spectacular demonstrations in which no one in particular is killed. The regular Arab soldiery under British leadership developed some steadiness in action. But the mercenaries of the desert were never a menace to the Turk unless they found him at a marked disadvantage. Accustomed to no sort of discipline, they were in action ignorant of formation and of tactics, except those suggested by native cunning and self-preservation; and, as might have been expected, if they failed to overwhelm the Turks in their first wild rush, or by ambush, they invariably broke off the fight and fled in disorder. A British officer of distinction who served with them during the war described them as "good ten-minute fighters"; and he added: "If you are leading them, and the Turks are not beaten in the first ten minutes, it is well to break away, or you will find yourself the only man left in action on your side."

The Arabs captured Mecca at the beginning of the rebellion, and were afterwards successful in their rush upon Akaba and a few other Turkish positions. But when the Turks possessed sound defences, as at Medina, Amman, and Deraa, they were never in the least danger from the Arabs until the British armies had swept all before them in Palestine and were threatening to cut communications behind the Turks

engaged against Hussein. The impotence of the tribesmen was further shown in their failure to deny the Hejaz railway to the enemy. For many hundreds of miles this line ran through Arab territory, guarded by very weak and scattered Turkish forces. But, except for temporary damage by successful raids, the railway continued to bear Turkish troops and supplies over the greater part of its length down to the eve of the armistice.

Still, if it is beyond dispute that the Arab fought purely as a mercenary and not as a nationalist, and that he was so harmless individually as a soldier, he nevertheless played an important part in the war against the Turks. His revolt was a tragedy to Constantinople. The Arab, if spasmodic and feeble in his campaigning, was, once committed, enthusiastic and whole-hearted in his persecution, plunder, and massacre of the Turks whenever opportunity offered. Primitive and greedy in his outlook, he deemed the winning side in the war to be the side which had the most money expressed in gold. Britain poured in the money; therefore Britain was winning, and Turkey was losing. Turkey losing was Turkey enfeebled, and fair spoil for any one who was stronger. This is the doctrine of all or nearly all the Arabs as seen by the British in the Palestine campaign; and it was followed out to the full against the Turks. Had Turkey been able to meet the Arabs on a definite line with barbed wire and a few machine-guns, she could have held them for years with a single division, and would never have had cause for anxiety. But she had to hold them over 500 miles of the Hejaz railway, and this absorbed not one, but a number of divisions. Moreover, the Arab was a distressing enemy, in that he was one who could not be destroyed. If he failed in his picturesque whirlwind raids, he faded away into the desert, where the Turk could scarcely endure, let alone pursue and destroy, his elusive, thrusting enemy. The Arab had no large towns which could be captured, to the detriment of his material and moral resources. He was always careful to avoid decisive pitched battle. As against the Arabs the Turks had imposed upon them the worst of all rôles in warfare, that of passive resistance on a thinly held and extended front.

The Arab revolt served four purposes which were valuable

to the Allies. (1) It diverted to eastern Palestine and the Hejaz a considerable force which would otherwise have been available against the British in Palestine proper and in Mesopotamia. (2) It made a heavy drain for more than two years upon Turkish reinforcements and supplies. (3) It protected the British army, in its advance across Sinai, Palestine, and Syria, from an attack on its right flank. Had the position been reversed—and had the Arabs fought on the side of the Turks and assisted them with transport and supplies on that flank—it is certain that the British army in Sinai and Palestine must have been substantially larger if its purpose was to be fulfilled. (4) It denied the use of the Arabian Red Sea coast to the Germans as a submarine base. This was the immediate and great relief which the intervention of Hussein gave to the minds of General Murray and Admiral Wemyss, and its importance in the conduct of the war was of the first magnitude to both Britain and Germany. By the employment of the Hejaz railway Germany might, at any time from the declaration of war by Turkey down to the middle of 1916, have carried submarines in parts to the Hejaz coast, re-assembled them there, and established at once a most formidable obstacle to the passage of Allied shipping. The narrow waters of the Gulf of Suez would have been ideal for the work of submarines; and their activities further east might at one stroke have crippled the British campaign in Mesopotamia and, by restricting or absolutely preventing direct communication between Egypt and India and Australia, have dealt a heavy blow to all operations in the Near East. Once established in the waters of the Indian Ocean, the spread of submarine bases towards the Far East, and on to Australia by way of the Malay Archipelago, would have been always practicable.



HEJAZ HORSEMEN AT DAMASCUS, OCTOBER, 1918

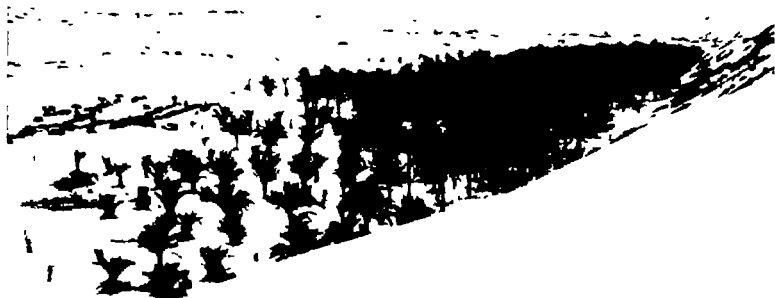
Aust. Har. Museum Official Photo No. P325

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THE WADY UM MUKSHIB, SINAI, IN FLOOD

*Taken by Major W. H. Scott with I. H. Reat
Aust War Museum Collection No. B-834*



THE HOD (DESERT PALM-GROVE) AT OGHRAITINA.

*Taken by Capt. H. A. Maunder, A.A.S.C.
Aust War Museum Collection No. B2491*

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CHAPTER VII

THE ADVANCE TO ROMANI

LIKE so many British campaigns, the advance into Sinai was to be marked by an unfortunate preliminary tragedy. The 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, under Brigadier-General E. A. Wiggin, which advanced to Romani on April 7th, was ill-suited for its mission. Its raw material in officers and men was of the best; but it was indifferently trained for actual warfare, and possessed few of the essentials for isolated work in the desert. Its men were recruited almost entirely from the farmers of the English shires, and its officers, with the exception of a few regulars, were drawn from the landed gentry.

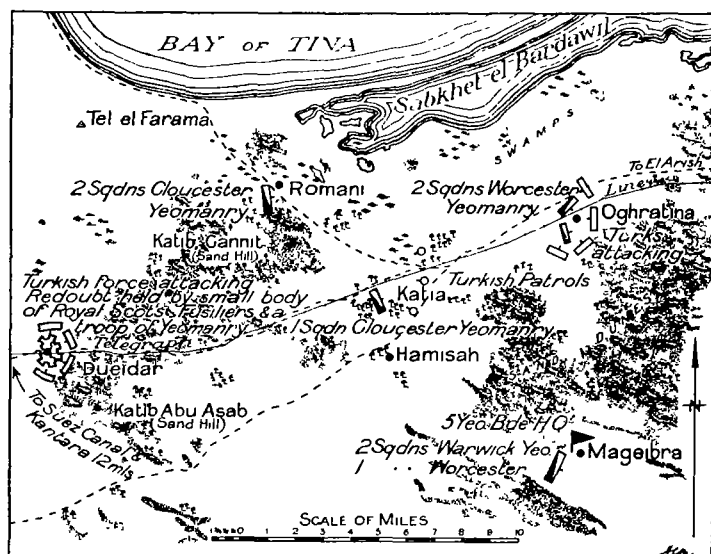
The wealthy young men of England, when they respond whole-heartedly, as they always do, to the nation's call to arms, tend to treat their newly acquired military responsibilities in a very sporting manner. They do not in the least mind dying for England, but they like to go to war casually and, if possible, in comfort. They ask that the wretched business shall not, except as a last resort, too seriously alter their regular habits of life. So it was with the ill-fated yeomanry brigade under General Wiggin's command. They rode gaily out into the desert to "have a crack" at an enemy whom they respected as a man but despised as a soldier. They moved in great comfort. The officers included a number of young men of noble families and more who were heirs to great riches, and their messes were laden with good things. They established brigade headquarters at Romani and standing outpost camps at Katia, five miles away, Oghratina, six miles still further east, and Hamisah, four miles south of Katia. With slight exception among the officers, all ranks were utter strangers to the desert, and a sharper contrast than that between the desert of northern Sinai and the soft and gracious English countryside is scarcely to be discovered in the world. But the strangeness of their surroundings only heightened the zest of the yeomanry for campaigning. The sun was not yet excessively hot; the men were well and fit, the horses in good

condition; the enemy, except in harmless numbers, was apparently far away in southern Palestine; and the brigade, conscious that it was the venturesome vanguard of Murray's army, was very well pleased with itself and its prospect.

The enemy made no secret of his knowledge of the yeomanry camps. German airmen patrolled the area almost daily and bombed the Katia camp on April 20th and both Katia and Romani on the 21st. The Bedouins had the full run of the British lines, and were always prowling through them; but, when questioned about the enemy, they said there were no Turks within a distance of many miles. The situation was as familiar to Major-General the Hon. H. A. Lawrence,¹ who was in command of the No. 3 Section, or northern sector, of the Canal Defences, as it was to Wiggin, inasmuch as Lawrence visited Romani on the 19th and Oghratina on the 20th. On April 22nd Wiggin learned from the natives that there was an enemy force 200 strong at Mageibra, about fourteen miles from Romani across the desert to the south-east; and he asked Lawrence by telegraph for permission to attack. Lawrence agreed, and Wiggin at once moved out in the early afternoon for Hamisah, where he picked up the garrison of the Warwickshires. On the night of the 22nd Wiggin, with two squadrons of Warwickshires and one squadron of the Worcesters, made a reconnaissance to Mageibra. The British commander's information was misleading, and probably had been purposely supplied to him by Bedouins acting as agents for the Turks. On the early morning of the 23rd, therefore, Wiggin's brigade was split up as follows:—Three squadrons with brigade headquarters at Mageibra, two squadrons of the Worcesters at Oghratina, one squadron of the Gloucesters at Katia, and the rest of the brigade in camp at Romani. Already at that time the whole oasis area from Oghratina to Romani, and as far west as Dueidar, was overrun with a force of Turks numerically stronger than the British brigade, and supported by a number of light guns. Yet until after the Turks opened fire at Oghratina, Katia, and Dueidar, Wiggin was not aware of an enemy's presence. The Turk is a fine infantry raider; and that night, with the Germans to plan for

¹ Gen. Hon. Sir H. A. Lawrence, G.C.B., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army, of Middlesex, Eng.; b. Southgate House, Southgate, Eng.; 8 Aug., 1861.

him, as they probably did on this occasion, he showed his quality. Dawn found him in strength at Oghratina, at Katia six miles further west, and fourteen miles still nearer the Canal at Dueidar. Marching in that country is exhausting and slow, but the Turks when they reached their objective were still fresh enough to attack with resolution.



Position of 5th Yeomanry Brigade, and attack by Turks at about 5.30 a.m. on 23rd April, 1916.

The morning of the 23rd favoured the Turkish plans. A heavy mist enfolded the sand-dunes, making observations beyond a short distance impossible. The soft sand muffled all sound of movement. The two squadrons of Worcesters under Major Williams-Thomas at Oghratina stood to arms before daylight, and then, despite the fog, withdrew their patrols. The Turks crept up through the fog at dawn, and opened a very heavy fire from light guns, machine-guns, and rifles at point-blank range. Thanks, doubtless, to the Bedouins, they appeared to know, even in the fog, the exact location of the camp. They advanced confidently and boldly. The British were completely surprised. First assailed when the fog lifted

at 5.30, the force resisted in a confused struggle for about two hours; then, when most of the firing parties had exhausted their ammunition, the Turks overwhelmed the positions in a rush from all sides. The yeomanry casualties in killed, wounded, and prisoners were fifteen officers and 187 of other ranks.

Having secured their prisoners, the Turks pressed on immediately to Katia. At Katia the Gloucesters, under Captain M. G. Lloyd-Baker, to the number of five officers and ninety other ranks, stood to arms half-an-hour before dawn. Horses were saddled and a patrol of eight men was sent out, which returned at about 5 o'clock, having seen no sign of the enemy in the mist. A few minutes later an enemy patrol about twenty strong came into contact with the yeomanry out-post line; a few shots were exchanged, and the Turks withdrew. At about 5.30 heavy fire was heard in the direction of Oghratina. The posts were connected by telephone; at 6 o'clock Oghratina reported that the enemy had been beaten off, but an hour later telephoned again that they were heavily attacked from all sides. The wire was then cut, but firing continued until 7.30, when it suddenly ceased. Oghratina had been overwhelmed. A few minutes later a strong enemy patrol approached the Katia camp, but on challenge retired; the mist then became so dense that the Gloucesters, straining their eyes in expectation of attack, could see nothing beyond a distance of a hundred yards.

The fog lifted at about 8 o'clock, and before 9 Corporal Tippet, who had been out with a patrol towards Oghratina, reported two long lines of men, about 300 in each, and also troops on camels, about a mile and a half away, marching towards Katia. Wiggin had orders to avoid serious engagement with a superior force, but this instruction was either not communicated to the outlying posts or was not acted upon. Lloyd-Baker was indifferently placed on a little flat piece of ground in a palm hod surrounded by sand-dunes. He was menaced by an infantry force greatly outnumbering his squadron; but he had his horses saddled. The way was clear towards Romani, or towards Wiggin's force at Hamisah, with which he was in touch by telephone; or he could have led his men mounted out of camp, and fought the advancing enemy

with safety as opportunity offered in the open. But he decided to stay where he was and fight in his camp, relying upon the fire-strength of his ninety men, and, as he was justified in believing, on the certainty of support from the camp at Romani or Wiggin's three squadrons at Hamisah. Perhaps, too, he thought he could ride out on his horses at any time, if the enemy proved too strong for him.

The Turks, however, speedily demolished any chance of mounted escape. Shortly before 9 o'clock three or four light guns opened fire on the camp from a knob to the east. The first twenty bursts went over; but the gunners, getting correction from good observation, then shortened their range and poured round after round into the yeomanry horses. In less than ten minutes most of the animals were killed. Then came a German aeroplane, whose observer turned the gun-fire on to the hastily formed British line. Simultaneously the Turkish riflemen opened heavy fire on the camp at from 800 to 1,000 yards.

In the tragic engagement which followed, the folly which first sent the brigade alone into the desert, and which afterwards divided it into isolated camps, ignorant of the enemy's movements, was redeemed by the magnificent fight to the death carried on by the slender force of yeomanry officers and men. Scooping out little shelter-holes in the sand, the Gloucesters maintained rapid fire against the rapidly increasing Turks, who, appearing first from the east, spread swiftly round the camp. For a time the British were confident they would receive reinforcements. Shortly before 11 o'clock the two other squadrons of Gloucesters were seen to be advancing on the left of the camp from the direction of Romani; about the same time a squadron of Worcesters from Hamisah, under Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. C. J. Coventry, advanced towards Katia on foot, having dismounted about three-quarters of a mile away on the west. Coventry and his men succeeded in joining up with Lloyd-Baker's force.

The Turks continued to receive reinforcements. At about 11 o'clock a body of enemy horsemen from 150 to 250 strong appeared about three miles away on the right flank of the Katia post; these men were apparently riding yeomanry horses captured at Oghratina. After dismounting in a hod they

joined the Turkish firing line. The enemy guns had ceased fire at 10.30 a.m., but at 12.30 p.m. they re-opened at about 2,000 yards, and the riflemen, constantly creeping forward in small parties under good cover, came within 300 yards. At 2 o'clock the camp was under concentrated punishment from guns, machine-guns, and rifles. The hospital tent was set on fire; casualties rapidly diminished the gallant yeomen's resistance, and ammunition was running very low. The dislike of the Turk to bayonet work in the open was never more clearly demonstrated. He advanced to within fifty yards of the British, determined if possible to use his rifles in disabling every man before risking a charge with the steel. The remnants of the yeomanry now had a good target, and they punished the Turks heavily as long as ammunition lasted.

Shortly before 3 o'clock, when the Turkish cordon was complete, the guns ceased fire. The British fire had diminished to an occasional splutter from the few rifles still in action. The Turks then rushed swarming into the camp, as the yeomanry got the order to retire, but not before the single machine-gun possessed by the squadron had been buried. Three of the five officers under Captain Lloyd-Baker, including Lord Elcho, were wounded and made prisoners. Captain Lloyd-Baker and 2nd Lieutenant W. A. Smith fought to the end and were killed. Of the men, seventeen were definitely known to have been killed and many wounded, while fifty-six men were posted as missing. Colonel Coventry's squadron shared fully in the gallant fight, and the inevitable fate, of Lloyd-Baker's men. One officer was killed, Coventry and three others were taken prisoners, and fifty men reported missing. About twenty unwounded men of the garrison attempted to escape, but only nine evaded the enemy.

Lloyd-Baker's decision to stand upon his ground was influenced by the fact that he had in the camp between thirty and forty dismounted men without horses, and a quantity of stores which he was loth to abandon. Moreover he received by telephone the definite promise of support from both Hamisah and Romani. Wiggin with two squadrons had followed Colonel Coventry from Hamisah. His force attacked the Turks' left flank and drove it back a few hundred yards, but without giving any relief to the garrison.

Lieutenant-Colonel Yorke, advancing with two squadrons from Romani, had a sharp little engagement with the enemy to the north of Katia, but was driven off. But at no time after Coventry came up was the counter-attack pushed with that resolution which alone would have saved the men at Katia. Had the relief fought with anything like the splendid spirit of the men in the camp, Lloyd-Baker's party would probably have been saved.

General Wiggan, when the fate of Katia and Oghratina became clear, decided to retire at once towards the Canal. He ordered Colonel Yorke to join him without returning to the camp at Romani, and the brigade, having abandoned much of its equipment, rode that night as far as Bir el Nuss. The Turks, after destroying the two posts, at once withdrew east with their prisoners, leaving the British wounded to the customary brutality of the Bedouins, who at once stripped them naked, refused them water, and taunted them with the cries "Finish British! Turks Kantara! Turks Port Said!"

Simultaneously with the attack on Oghratina, another Turkish column appeared before the little British infantry post at Dueidar, twenty miles further west, and only twelve miles from the Canal. At Dueidar, a small British redoubt, protected by a few strands of barbed wire at a distance of 200 yards, was held by about 100 Royal Scots Fusiliers of the 52nd (Lowland) Division and a troop of yeomanry. A few hundred yards away, at a little oasis, was a further small body of Royal Scots in reserve. The garrison at the redoubt stood to arms before dawn, and the troop of yeomanry went out, reported all clear, and returned to the lines. Apparently the Turks intended to rush the post with bombs and bayonet, for just on dawn, when the British camp had settled down again, they appeared at the barbed wire. As they picked their way in strength through it, still unseen, a fox-terrier belonging to a man in the fusiliers began to bark excitedly and rushed towards the wire. The alarm was instantly given, the garrison turned out and poured rapid rifle fire into the advancing enemy. Reinforcements were rushed up from the oasis, and further aid summoned from Hill 40 in the neighbourhood; and after a sharp brief engagement, in which the Turks and some Arabs who

accompanied them suffered heavily, the enemy was driven off, leaving seventy dead and thirty wounded on the ground. The British had two officers and eighteen men killed. This enemy column, about 300 rifles strong, had traversed the desert on camels, which they had left a few hundred yards from the position.

The merit of the Turks' achievement was that they crossed nearly the whole of the desert of northern Sinai, and broke and routed a mounted brigade. They certainly had a marked superiority in numbers, but the British had the mobility of their horses and a clear line of communication. That the brigade was so faultily and dangerously disposed before the attack, and so indifferently handled during the fighting, does not detract from a singularly fine piece of work done by the enemy. The Turks had no thought of remaining in the oasis. Their movement was a true raid; having succeeded beyond their expectations, they proceeded at once to advertise and exaggerate in Palestine and Syria the importance of their victory. The British prisoners were hurried back into Judæa and paraded through the streets of Jerusalem as evidence to the Arabs, and the many other races and religions of the Holy City, of the invincibility of Turkish arms. Coming so soon after Gallipoli, and with the Turkish star ascendant at the time in Mesopotamia, the success upon Sinai was of great political and moral value to the enemy.

The Turks were either particularly well advised as to Murray's plans, or especially lucky in their attack on the yeomanry. When the blow fell, the 2nd Light Horse Brigade under Ryrie was already moving eastwards to support the British force in the oasis district. On April 14th, General Murray had cabled a highly cheerful despatch to the War Office. He reported that the broad-gauge railway was already laid for twenty-six kilometres east of the Canal, and that it was expected to reach a point three miles west of Romani by April 26th. "I shall then have," the despatch continued, "two mounted brigades and part of the 52nd Division in occupation of the whole district, and hope to be able to give the *quietus* to small enemy forces in the neighbourhood." The despatch also informed the War Office that all water-supplies within thirty miles of the Canal were now patrolled by the

British, and that a mobile force was ready to go out and deal with enemy forces approaching them, or to demolish the wells if that should appear necessary. In brief, Murray by the middle of April believed he had finally denied the enemy all approach towards the Canal except by the northern or Katia route, and he was satisfied that the blocking of that route was well in hand. "Katia," he added, "is already occupied, and should be finally secured against every attempt on the part of the enemy by the end of this month."

The 2nd Light Horse Brigade had arrived at Salhia on April 8th, and was followed two days later by the New Zealand Brigade and the headquarters of Anzac Mounted Division. Every effort was made to hasten the complete equipment of the two brigades, and there seems to have been a general feeling that the yeomanry were dangerously "in the air," and should be reinforced as speedily as possible. On April 22nd the 5th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland), under Lieutenant-Colonel L. C. Wilson,² reached Kantara under orders from the 52nd Division, while the rest of the 2nd Brigade was ordered to leave Salhia on April 23rd, reach Kantara that evening, and march immediately towards the Katia area. Early on the morning of the 23rd Wilson received news of the attack upon Dueidar, and was ordered to succour the post without delay. Major D. C. Cameron,³ advancing at a smart pace with the leading squadron, reached Dueidar after the Turks had been driven off, and immediately took up the pursuit. The enemy, however, had a good start on his camels, and Cameron's horses, handicapped by the deep sand, were unable to come up with the main body, which retreated to the south-east. Cameron, after picking up a few enemy stragglers, returned to Dueidar at dusk.

Meanwhile the remainder of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade had reached Kantara at 6.30 on the evening of the 23rd, after a six and a half hours' march from Salhia. Ryrie was at once informed of the enemy successes, and was ordered to make all speed to Hill 70, to cover the retreat of the yeomanry. The

² Brig-Gen L. C. Wilson, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 3rd L.H. Bde, 1917/19 Solicitor; b. Brisbane, Q'land, 11 July, 1871.

³ Col Sir Donald Cameron, K.C.M.G. D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 5th L.H. Regt., 1917/19; member of Aust House of Representatives, 1919/31, 1934. B. Brisbane, 19 Nov., 1879.

brigade clattered across the pontoon bridge over the Canal in the bright moonlight of Easter Sunday (St. George's Day), and rode eastwards into the desert by the famous Royal road of the ancients. "The only entry into Egypt is by this desert," says Herodotus, and that entry was now to be denied to the Turks by the Australian light horsemen. The brigade was in fine trim for operations. The men were fresh and touched with excitement, the horses were in perfect condition. As the column hurried through the magical moonlight across the desert, all ranks felt the influence, as they so often did in the long campaign which followed, of the teeming associations of the route which since the birth of time had been trodden by mighty armies and great personages. Here the desert air had resounded with the huge marching hosts of the Pharaohs, the Persians, the Macedonians under Alexander, the legions of Rome, and the matchless revolutionaries of France under Napoleon. With the crossing of the Canal in strength was launched the amazing enterprise of the men of one of the world's youngest Christian peoples for the conquest of patriarchal Palestine. The idea seemed so unreal and ludicrous that many officers and men laughed aloud in the night as they pondered it.

Although the brigade was in sound campaigning condition and high spirits, it rode out indifferently equipped for a severe campaign. When Ryrie reached Kantara, he was without transport for his ambulance. All that offered for the purpose was a batch of seventy camels; and scarcely a man in the ambulance had ever handled camels. Moreover, the gear supplied with the camels was old and defective. But the ambulance men, with the cheerfulness and adaptability which always distinguished them, struggled bravely with the strange animals, and after a wild scramble marched gaily out to time with the brigade. All ranks were entirely without tents, and were limited to one blanket each. The brigade had no sanitary supplies, and was faced, at least for a few days, with short rations. Riding in their khaki and large slouch hats, without a single splash of colour, on their long-tailed horses, these young men from the new continent were perhaps the least pretentious force that ever appeared on the old Sultani road. They paced along in the night, silent except for an occasional order passed

up and down the column to regulate the speed, and for the jangle of clashing stirrup-irons, in marked contrast to the richly-clad, many-coloured army pageants which had ridden the track so often all down the ages.

As the brigade advanced into the desert, it was met in the night by scattered yeomanry parties who had missed Wiggin's camp at Bir el Nuss and were hastening back towards the Canal. Ryrie thus realised for the first time the full extent of the Turks' dramatic success. The yeomanry were badly shaken. They could give no account of the situation ahead beyond declaring that the Turks were advancing in great strength.

Half-an-hour before midnight, after nearly twelve hours in the saddle, Ryrie reached Hill 70, seven miles east of Kantara, and remained there awaiting orders. Next morning, the 24th, he pushed on to railhead, and Chauvel, with Anzac Mounted Division Headquarters and the New Zealand Mounted Brigade, arrived at Hill 70. At railhead Ryrie found a British officer in charge of some hundreds of natives of the Egyptian Labour Corps, who had not been advised of the disasters at Katia and Oghratina.

On the 24th Chauvel was ordered to take over the command of all troops east of Hill 70, including the infantry at Dueidar, and during the day he shifted his headquarters to Hill 40. His first step was to order a complete change in the arrangements for the defence of the oasis. A month before he had pointed out to the High Command the folly of establishing small isolated posts at places like Hamisah, Oghratina, and Katia, and now, with the full concurrence of General Lawrence, he proceeded to form one strong camp at Romani, and to control the oasis area to the east and south by a system of daily reconnaissances in strength. Chauvel showed in this decision that sound sense of a position which always marked him, and a particular appreciation of the difficulties and possibilities of the Katia district.

Ryrie's 2nd Brigade moved forward on the 25th, occupied Romani and Bir Etmaler, and found at once that these camps, although abandoned by the yeomanry after the fighting at Katia, had not been entered by the enemy. The Turks had withdrawn eastwards to Bir El Abd, sixteen miles from Katia,

while the yeomanry were retiring westwards towards the Canal. And now were sown the seeds of the unfortunate and prolonged misunderstanding between the British yeomanry and the Australian light horsemen, which for upwards of a year did much to affect the happiness of the mounted troops in the campaign. The Australians were not favourably impressed by the spectacle of the fugitive parties of yeomanry whom they passed in their advance from the Canal to Hill 70. Nor was their respect for the British brigade increased when they reached its headquarters camp at Romani, and found that it had been abandoned, although not approached by the enemy. Moreover, the light horsemen discovered in the officers' messes of that camp evidences of good living which they deemed inconsistent with serious campaigning. This led them to a foolish, although a natural action. They had ridden out hurriedly at very short notice without full equipment, and on scanty rations. They had come to succour the yeomanry, finding the yeomanry fled, they helped themselves to any foodstuffs and military equipment which they could find in their camps.

Having established his headquarters at Romani, Rylie pushed his regiments out upon reconnaissance to Katia, Oghratina, and Hamisah. Nowhere did he encounter the enemy. At Hamisah he found tents and other material abandoned in haste by the yeomanry, but inspection of the positions at Katia and Oghratina disclosed the resolution with which the British had sustained the unequal struggle against the Turks. At Oghratina the bodies of seventy British and twenty-five Turks were located, and at Katia the Australians buried thirty-three British dead and counted seventy bodies of horses and forty-eight of camels. In neither camp was there any evidence of early surrender. Both garrisons had fought valiantly as long as their ammunition lasted, and until the Turks had overwhelmed the survivors with bomb and bayonet.

The sudden smashing of the yeomanry brigade naturally caused excitement and anxiety at Murray's headquarters. There was no fear of a general Turkish attack upon the Canal; but it was only too evident that the yeomanry brigade had been pushed forward without a proper appreciation of the

danger of its position, and that its disposition had been extremely hazardous. Steps were at once taken to complete the Anzac Mounted Division, and the movement of the 1st Light Horse Brigade from Upper Egypt was hastened. At the same time the advance of the 52nd Division to Romani was vigorously pushed. Murray's despatches to the War Office clearly indicate his concern, and also his consciousness that his confident forecast of April 14th had been badly at fault. Cabling the news of the reverse, he first mentioned the successful resistance at Dueidar, and then stated that the Katia garrison had been attacked by 3,000 Turks and after severe fighting had been withdrawn to Dueidar and Romani. In his first despatch he did not mention Oghratina.

When that despatch was forwarded, Murray may not have possessed all the facts of the yeomanry disaster; even if he did, he was to be forgiven perhaps for not at once sending the evil tidings to the War Office. At that moment the British Cabinet was hourly expecting news of the fall of Kut el Amara, with the loss of the garrison under the intrepid Townshend. On April 25th Lord Kitchener, ignorant of the confusion in Sinai, cabled to Murray, saying that there was "little or no prospect of saving Kut," and therefore "any success you can achieve during the next few days will be most valuable" as an offset to the failure in Mesopotamia. But the yeomanry misfortune, bitter as it was, served a very useful purpose. It was a grim lesson, but it was well learned. Never again in the whole campaign was a British force surprised and enveloped, a remarkable fact in a war of extended fronts and widely scattered units.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DESERT ORDEAL

THE first consideration after the disaster to the yeomanry was to establish in the oasis area a definite position, safe against any attack the enemy might be capable of making. Lawrence, accompanied by Chauvel, Chaytor,¹ and Ryrie, rode over the Romani country on April 30th, and gave attention to a proposal to protect the left flank of the British position by increasing the shallow waters of Lake Bardawil. The level of the lake was believed to be lower than that of the sea, and soon afterwards a cut was made and a junction effected with the waters of the Mediterranean. The attempt to deepen the lake was, however, unsuccessful.

Investigation of the Romani country satisfied the British leaders that it was an almost ideal site for defensive purposes. General Murray inspected the position early in May, and decided to adopt Chauvel's scheme—to establish a strong camp at Romani, to patrol and, as far as possible, to hold the well-watered region around Katia, not by means of isolated fixed camps, but by constant reconnaissance in strength; and, if possible, to induce the Turks, when their expected advance was made, to accept battle upon the prepared Romani ground. Such a scheme was so obvious to the enemy that its chances of success seemed very slender; nevertheless it did succeed in an astonishing manner.

Northern Sinai bears the comprehensive description of desert. And, broadly speaking, a desert it is. But it varies sharply in the nature of its soil, in its appearance, and in the scope it offers for the movement of troops. The outstanding feature of the long coast-line, from Sinai to the Plain of Acre in northern Palestine, is a fringe of rolling, golden sand-hills. Along much of the margin of the Mediterranean the sea has, even since Greek and Roman times, retreated appreciably from the land, and the strong winds of the country,

¹ Maj.-Gen. Sir E. W. C. Chaytor, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.B., A.D.C., p.s.c. Commanded Anzac Mtd. Div. 1917/19. Officer of N.Z. Staff Corps; son of late J. C. Chaytor, Esq., of Marshlands, Spring Creek, N.Z.; b. Motueka, N.Z., 21 June, 1868. Died 15 June, 1939.

working on the deserted sands, have built up a very mobile system of steep, close-packed dunes drifting inland. This fringe is not continuous, and along much of the seaboard it is narrow; but over extensive distances it has a width of from three to four miles. In places, as about Romani, the coastal margin is flat; but the dunes reappear close behind, and extend inland in irregular groups, projecting like great buttresses on to the plain behind.

Inside the long skirt of these dunes there is, from the Canal to Mount Carmel, an undulating plain extending eastwards to the great central range system of Palestine, which, running south from the Lebanons, and broken only once by the Esdraelon Plain, stretches down across Sinai. This plain is in the north the Maritime Plain of the ancients; divided in detail, it is first the Plain of Acre, which develops to the east into Esdraelon; then the Plain of Sharon, which marches with Samaria; then the Philistine Plain, marching with Judæa. In southern Palestine it merges into the Negib, or the grazing south land of the patriarchs. From the eastern edge of Sinai up to Mount Carmel it is a very fertile land, always renowned for rich, easily-won harvests and sweet native grasses. But in Sinai its character is changed by the almost entire absence of rainfall. Extending southwards from the yellow sand-dunes of the coast to the foot-hills of the forbidding desolate ranges of central Sinai, its width varies between thirty and forty miles. Its aspect is harsh and depressing. Over most of the area it is broken by stunted prickly bushes banked up with the wind-driven sand. Stony little plains are succeeded by widespread intricate masses of sand-dunes. For many miles around Katia the desolation is relieved by innumerable hods of date palms, which, sustained and refreshed by shallow springs of brackish water, grow in profusion and provide a living for a few thousand Bedouins. So widespread is this oasis that, viewed from the sand-dunes about Romani, the date palms may be seen stretching in dark, almost unbroken plantations for many miles to the south; then, looking further, the observer sees many isolated springs marked by their trees. On this undulating plain country of northern Sinai mounted troops move slowly but without excessive exhaustion, and the trans-

port of guns is not impossible; but the patches of sand, the extreme heat, and the scarcity of good water make it extremely laborious for the movement of infantry.

Near Romani the sand-dunes extend inland about six miles, and the position created is a natural stronghold about thirty square miles in extent, jutting boldly out on to the desert plain and covering on the south the track from El Arish to the Canal. It is a striking and impressive intervention, admirably fitted to be a defensive base for an army guarding Egypt from the east. Towards the Mediterranean it is flanked by the shores of the western extremity of Lake Bardawil; but towards its centre it unfolds into a comparatively level tableland basin, on which troops can move with relatively little climbing, although everywhere the sand is deep and yielding. This little tableland is marked with a number of palm hods, as at Etmaler, capable of giving ample shade to considerable bodies of troops. On its southern and south-eastern sides the position terminates in a series of abrupt outstanding dunes of raw, shifting sand, which appears under the pressure of the winds to be steadily encroaching upon the firmer ground of the plain. These dunes are usually long and narrow, and terminate in a feather edge so fine that a man must carefully stamp a position flat before he can balance on the top in safety. Owing to the wind, one side of the dune is usually so precipitous that it cannot be climbed, while the other is sloping and accessible. These dunes appear as great buttresses holding up the Romani tableland, and preventing its liquid sand from overflowing and flattening itself out across the desert plain to the south. A few of them, rising above their fellows, are visible from a considerable distance, and these stood as guardians to the British forces now assembling at Romani. Between ran narrow sloping lanes up to the position behind, and their importance was at once appreciated. As the summer wore on, they were distinguished by names destined to become immortal in Australian battle history. To the south-east of the Romani camp was Katib Gannit (226 feet); four miles away due south of the camp, Mount Meredith (230 feet); while further round towards the south-east corner was Mount Royston (220 feet).

From the Canal to Romani on the British side, a distance

of twenty-three miles, the approach was for the first fourteen miles by the old caravan road to Dueidar at the edge of the sand-dunes. This portion of the track runs over firm ground, and offered no obstacle to the passage of all arms. From Dueidar to Romani the route was through the soft and heavy dunes, which made the transport of guns and any other wheeled vehicles very difficult and slow. The troublesome part of the journey, however, was only a few miles in length, and Romani was therefore comparatively easy of approach from the base in Egypt. If necessary, reinforcements could be brought up in a few hours, and, as the railway was rapidly approaching Romani, the position was favoured by communications which should have been satisfactory to any leader.

Romani, then, was an almost ideal defensive locality. It was extraordinarily strong in its natural qualities and position; it was close to the British man-power in Egypt, and to an abundant source of supplies. It stood in the direct path of an enemy approaching from the east across northern Sinai. It was capable of being made invulnerable to frontal attack; and although it could be ignored by a diversion into the plain on the south, no enemy striking for the Canal could afford to leave it unassailed on his flank, since its garrison, especially if mounted, could emerge fresh from the sand-dunes and operate rapidly on the hard ground of the plain.

The Turk advancing upon Romani was faced with a task which might well have harassed the boldest of leaders. In May, 1916, his railway had been pushed as far as the eastern fringe of Sinai. From railhead he had a comparatively simple march over hard tracks until he reached the neighbourhood of the Wady el Arish. But from El Arish to the oasis area he had a waterless stretch of about fifty-five miles to cover. This is the track which almost cost Napoleon his army when marching up into Palestine, and it has always been a severe strain on forces moving to and from Egypt. If the Turk, instead of following the northern road, advanced towards central Sinai and then struck north across the rough desert plain, his task was no lighter; in fact, it would probably be heavier, as his communications would be further extended. One factor was strongly in his favour. The weakness of Murray's decision—to keep his force in one body

at Romani and to hold the rest of the Katia oasis by reconnaissance—was that the Turks could at any time, by an advance in strength, occupy Katia and establish themselves there; with sound communications, they would be very difficult to shift. This was clear to the British leader; but, with a sound sense of Turkish intentions, he believed that the enemy would not be content merely to sit down at Katia and menace the Canal, but, flushed with his successes at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia and his local victory over the yeomanry, would endeavour to destroy the British army at Romani and then strike for the Canal. When the Turk reached Katia, he would have covered the worst of the desert, and his subsequent advances to Romani and on to the Canal would be over firm ground through country well supplied with water at shallow depths.

At the beginning of May the total British force based on Egypt, including the Salonika army, reached a total of 14,168 officers and 343,000 men of other ranks. Of these, 369 officers and 25,000 men were natives of Egypt and India. After deducting 4,500 officers and 110,000 men who belonged to the Salonika force, General Murray had about 220,000 white British troops under his command in Egypt. This force was still being drawn upon for France, and to a minor degree for Mesopotamia, as quickly as divisions were re-organised by Murray and transport was available to carry them. He now began to have clearly defined views as to the strength he would need for Sinai; on May 3rd he advised the War Office that his force for operations east of the Canal should not be reduced below three infantry divisions of a total strength of 50,000 rifles and his mounted troops. His mounted force available for the field at that time was made up of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigades, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, and the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade which had been so badly mauled in the recent fighting.

The Commander-in-Chief continued to show the most generous spirit towards the needs of the decisive theatre in France. "Do not be afraid," he cabled the War Office during May, "to take my 11th, 42nd, and two further Australian (infantry) Divisions from me. I may not do wonders

with the balance, but I will not be inactive." But he was obviously afraid that the War Office would reduce him to a level which would not only make an advance into Sinai impossible, but would expose the Canal to Turkish attack. On May 10th he emphasised to the War Office the necessity of being able to keep his three infantry divisions up to full strength. He pointed out that when the 11th and 42nd, and the 4th and 5th Australian Infantry Divisions, were withdrawn—and also, as he assumed, the Australian infantry reinforcements—he would have available for Sinai only the 52nd and 54th British Infantry Divisions and two brigades of the 53rd, all much below war strength, and six battalions of Indians; and for none of these did he possess assured reinforcements. Murray's position was most unenviable. He was willing to yield all he could, but he did not know where the demand would stop. He feared even for his mounted brigades. "I am assuming," he cabled to the War Office at this time, "that you are leaving the three Australian light horse brigades and the New Zealand brigade with me. Otherwise I shall be deprived of the only really reliable mounted troops I have." The British leader had already made up his mind as to the relative quality of the Anzacs and the yeomanry. But he saw clearly that the yeomanry, if not yet highly efficient, could with vigorous training under regular officers be turned into first-class cavalry. Already he had taken the steps necessary to effect the desired change, and the fine work of the yeomanry later in the campaign was directly due to his judgment and foresight.

By the middle of May the brief cool season was over, and Sinai was glistening under the fierce heat of summer. The Turks were believed to have three divisions, the 3rd, 23rd, and 27th, in northern Sinai and southern Palestine, disposed roughly inside the quadrilateral El Arish, Bir el Hassana, Beersheba, and Gaza. In addition there was an Arab force in Sinai of about 4,000 Bedouins, chiefly drawn from the Ibn Rashid tribes, and also including some Egeil, the adventurous Moslem camel-dealers. These men were armed by the Turks with modern weapons, and a number of them had fought with reckless courage at Dueidar. As a rule, however, their fighting qualities were known to be nominal, and

the British properly considered them useful to the enemy chiefly as guides and scouts. The development of the campaign showed that to be a generous estimate. In the long campaign the British suffered few casualties from the Arabs, and (as far as they were tried by the British) they proved unreliable scouts and inferior guides. More rumours are born daily in the Near East than in any other part of the world, and the British were not yet skilled at sifting the false from the true. Credence was therefore given to a report that Djemal Pasha intended to attack the Canal at Ismailia during May.

Impressed by the danger of further enemy raids either in the oasis district, or against the Canal further to the south, Murray strained his resources to strengthen his position east of the Canal. In the No. 1 and No. 2 Sections the scanty water-supply on the approaches from central Sinai was patrolled and watched with increased vigilance. After the raid on the yeomanry, the Turks, with the exception of small parties, had retreated to the El Arish district, and a fortnight later there was no enemy strength within sixty miles of the Canal Defences.

Frequent and urgent appeals to the War Office had resulted in a small force of aircraft being sent out to Murray, and the army flying corps had taken over much of the air work from the Royal Naval Air Service. But all through 1916 the British airmen on the front were handicapped by the inferiority of their machines. They were always out-classed by their German rivals, and carried out their vital work of reconnaissance only at a risk they should not have been called upon to take. The British airmen had failed to observe the approach of the Turkish raiding force upon Oghratina and Katia, and in the operations which followed there were many lapses of a similar nature. The fact was that the Turks marched chiefly by night and concealed themselves in the palm hods by day, where they were safe from the keen eyes of the British pilots. The airmen, flying low, often gained useful knowledge from tracks in the sand; but throughout the campaign northern Sinai proved to be a baffling locality for sound observation from the air.

The beginning of May found two regiments of the 2nd

Light Horse Brigade at Romani, supported by a brigade of the 52nd Division at railhead, three miles to the west; while the bulk of the 52nd Division was at Kantara, with strong posts at Hills 70 and 40 and Dueidar. The New Zealanders were in support at Hill 70. Every effort was made to hasten the advance of the railway. The physical obstacles were not serious, but the loose sand gave more trouble than had been anticipated, and progress was disappointingly slow. Murray advised the War Office that the whole oasis area "was now effectively patrolled by us," and that he would "push forward as rapidly as possible," and strike at every concentration of the enemy within reach. But the possibility of "striking" at anything was still remote, and that fact was only too evident to the Commander-in-Chief. Ryrie was ordered to be "very active" with his two regiments, but he was not to "remain long in the same position," nor to engage in a "decisive fire-fight in defence of any locality the enemy may temporarily occupy." He had clear instructions to fall back on the advanced infantry posts in the face of hostile pressure. Ryrie had, in short, the very orders which should have been given to the unfortunate yeomanry brigade. Lack of sufficient camel-transport made it impossible to push the 52nd Division up to Romani ahead of the railway.

With the arrival of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Romani there was begun the arduous and prolonged work on the desert which had its culmination and reward in the Battle of Romani. Ryrie's men, as we have seen, were rushed into the district very short of equipment. The heat was terrific; flies swarmed in the congested camps; it was the season of the dread khamsin; the men were short of clothes and blankets. But at the outset the 6th and 7th Regiments (both from New South Wales) were called upon for so much activity that they had little time to think of discomfort. Having examined the ground of the recent fighting and buried the British dead at Oghratina and Katia, they engaged immediately in reconnaissance over wide areas. Every order from Chauvel showed the influence of the yeomanry disaster. Their camp at Romani was vigilantly guarded; as their force was so small, this meant comparatively little rest or sleep for the men. Moreover the care of horses on the desert is

extremely laborious. Water for the men was brought up from the Canal on camels, but the horses had to be supplied from the local wells. On the oasis area water was freely found at a depth of from two to twelve feet; but the supply was more or less brackish, and the springs which were touched by the roots of the palm trees proved especially bitter. During the first few weeks of the campaign, before the native initiative and resource of the Australian bushmen came into full play, the task of watering horses was slow and exhausting. Timber was lacking for the wells, which had constantly to be dug out, the soakage being often limited. Hours were frequently spent in watering a regiment. For a time the horses showed a dislike for the water, and rapidly lost condition in consequence, but after a few weeks they drank it greedily and thrived upon it. The men drank the well water when sorely pressed by thirst, but, except at a few of the best wells, never with appreciation; its chemical qualities were such that it curdled when boiled, and so could not be used for tea-making. In a number of ways the Turks disclosed a stouter constitution than the Australians, and when they were in this area they drank from each well as they came to it, and apparently without ill-effect.

The Bedouins of the desert had undoubtedly served the Turks against the yeomanry, and it was now decided to regard the former as enemies. Orders were given to the 2nd Light Horse Brigade to capture as many of them as possible, and pass them to the rear, where they were to be held and treated with consideration. But the task of rounding up the elusive natives of northern Sinai was an exceedingly troublesome one. In all the barren Peninsula there are between 20,000 and 30,000 men, women, and children. They are loosely grouped into tribes, but recognise very little authority. Each local sheikh is practically independent. In the rugged mountain region of the central and southern area the Bedouins win a narrow livelihood by grazing their sparse flocks along the beds of the wadys and by the sale of acacia charcoal to Egypt. In the northern oasis area they depend almost entirely upon the product of the date palms, the dates of Sinai being the best in the world. Their sole labour is in cross-fertilising the pollen of the male and female trees, and in harvesting the annual crop.

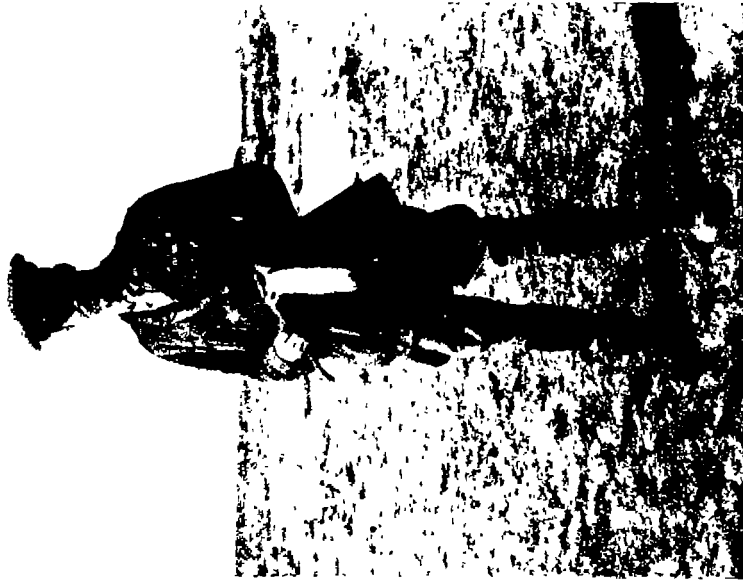
In 1915 the date crop had failed, and when the British advanced to Romani the Bedouins were short of food, and only too ready, therefore, to serve the Turks as spies. Avoiding the palm-hods, which they deem unhealthy as dwelling-places, the natives live, as a rule, on the bare sands a few hundred yards from the springs, in little square enclosures of palm branches which afford them shelter from the heat by day and the cold desert winds by night. Uncommonly keen of sight, their trained eyes are expert at discerning movement upon the desert; barefooted and scantily clad in cotton, fast runners, and marvellously enduring, they were most difficult to capture. On the approach of the light horse they would break up and scatter individually over the dunes, and wherever the sand was soft they could easily outdistance the horses. Moreover the Australians, although they chased the men with all their energy, had strong scruples as to the capture and hustling of the women and children. During the summer a few hundred were made prisoners; but many remained, and during all movement by the mounted troops they were to be seen keenly watching from distant hilltops. That they constantly served the Turks was beyond doubt, and when time and distance prevented them carrying verbal messages, they signalled the approach of the British by the lighting of fires. Scarcely higher in civilisation than the Australian blacks, these wretched tribes presented a miserable and starved appearance. They seldom carried arms. Their women were particularly unattractive, but nevertheless were almost invariably veiled.

With the New Zealand Brigade at Hill 70 in support of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Romani, with the infantry of the 52nd Division moving steadily forward, and the railway always advancing, the position early in May was soundly re-established. Active and exhausting reconnaissance in strength was then commenced by the light horse and the New Zealanders. The object of this probing, which was continued until the Battle of Romani in August, was to locate, and if possible destroy, advanced parties of the enemy, to mark and, where desirable, improve the water-supply in the various hods, to comb out the Bedouins, and to study the country with a view to subsequent operations. Bir el Abd, twenty miles from Romani along the track to El Arish, was

the limit of this reconnaissance to the east, and it extended as far as Mageibra, some fourteen miles to the south-east. In a temperate country the work would have imposed no hardship on man or horse. But in Sinai, with its blazing summer heat and frequent heavy sand, all movement is extremely arduous and wearing. May and June passed without serious incident, and the light horsemen, although they suffered severely from overwork and lack of sleep, steadily hardened and improved. Their contact with the enemy was slight, but it sufficed to make them expert in the more subtle side of their work as mounted infantry. They became masters of observation, advanced their proficiency with the rifle, completed themselves as campaigning horsemen and, as the weeks wore on, developed their natural sense of direction and location to a pitch almost superhuman.

At this time the light horsemen's strongly marked gift of improvisation enabled them to overcome many of the obstacles and evils of the desert. Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson, of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, introduced the "spearpoint" pump with which he had been familiar in Queensland. This simple device was made up of a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch tube with a solid point, above which was a section of strong wire gauze. Carried without trouble on the saddle, this pump entirely changed the practice of watering the horses. In a few minutes it could be unpacked and driven into the sand in a likely spot for water; by the time other men had laid out the light canvas troughing, a plentiful supply of water was being pumped out of the sand for the refreshment of the thirsty horses. The pump also greatly increased the flow of wells already in existence. Before its application the soakage was often slow, but the pump, driven down through the bottoms of the wells, saved both time and labour in excavation.

When the Australians first applied for these pumps from Ordnance, the British authorities refused the issue. The light horsemen then purchased the necessary material out of regimental funds; and, when they had demonstrated that by their use a brigade of horse at Romani could be watered in half-an-hour, they were adopted for the whole army. The spearpoint pump abolished the water problem for horses in Sinai; when the army at a later date advanced into the highly fertile region



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL J. G. BROWNE, CHIEF STAFF
OFFICER OF THE ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION, 1916-19.

First War Museum Official Photo No. B927



PUTTING DOWN A "SPEARPOINT" PUMP IN THE DESERT

*Taken by Lieut. H. L. Brisbane, 42nd Mtd Div. Engineers
First War Museum Collection No. B2758*

To face p. 104



CAMEL CACOETS FOR THE TRANSPORT OF THE WOUNDED

*Taken by Capt H G Leahy, 3rd L H Fld Amb
Aust War Museum Collection No B2483*



SAND SLEIGHS WITH WOUNDED.

*Taken by Lieut-Col W H Scott, 9th L H Regt
Aust War Museum Collection No B2827*

To face p 105.

of the Philistine plain, the task of watering was actually far more difficult there than it had been on the desert behind.

The wits of the Australians and New Zealanders caused much concern to the regular British officers at General Headquarters. Immediately the light horsemen arrived on the desert they were confronted with the extreme difficulty of transporting the wounded. When the regiments left Australia they included mounted stretcher-bearers who rode with the regiments; but, as British cavalry used dismounted bearers, the Australian innovation was condemned, and orders were issued to discontinue it. But the light horsemen protested, and were permitted to retain the necessary horses. When they went into Sinai, their mounted bearers were the only ones who could move efficiently. The New Zealanders quickly adopted the same method. But the British did not yield without an amusingly characteristic resistance. The Australian application for poles to enable the horsemen to carry the stretchers was refused, and the difficulty was met, as with the spearpoint pumps, by the purchase of bamboo poles out of Australian funds.

In action the bearers worked dismounted. The subsequent transport of wounded behind the line was attended at the outset with the sharpest suffering to the wounded. Sand carts or wheeled ambulances, which were hooded wire mattresses borne on broad-tired wheels, could make no headway in the heavy sand; and the camel cacolets, made up of a deck-chair contrivance swung on either side of a camel, proved frightful appliances of torture. The Australians therefore devised simple sleighs made of sheets of galvanised iron turned up at the front and drawn by two horses. These proved a safe and gentle means of transporting even the most painful cases, and later they were displaced by a New Zealand improvement of the same device. Still another innovation, introduced by the New Zealanders, was the establishment with each mounted brigade ambulance of dental units, capable of treating all simple cases and doing plate-work in the field. Up to 500 cases were treated by one of these units in a month, and the temporary evacuation of great numbers of men was prevented. Here, too, the British resisted the novelty, but finally adopted it for all the cavalry.

The handling of horses in the wheeled transports also resulted in a friendly struggle between the Australians and the higher authorities. At the outset three of the horses in the six-horse teams were ridden by drivers in the usual army way. But the Australian teamsters were drawn from men accustomed in the back country at home to driving any number of horses single-handed, and as a rule without reins at all. Australia had sent to Egypt a particularly fine lot of small, active Clydesdale horses for transport work; and the practical teamsters resented seeing animals, already distressed by the heavy sand, carrying what they deemed the unnecessary burden of postillions. The British, however, refused an application for the issue of reins and the abolition of drivers. But the teamsters would not be baulked. They bought and improvised reins, discarded the postillions, and handled their six horses alone from the box. Then the army conventionalists again surrendered, and once more adopted the Australian style for the whole force, so effecting a great saving in men and increased service from the horses.

It is necessary to mention these things because, although they may seem trifles, the spirit which initiated them was the spirit which conquered the desert and led on to the overthrow of the Turkish armies. The ultimate triumph in Sinai was not so much a triumph over military opposition—although that was substantial—as a triumph over exceedingly harsh natural conditions. And in no branch of the army was the fight waged with more zeal and effect and with more influence on the success of the campaign than in the Australian and the New Zealand Army Medical Corps. When the Anzac Mounted Division moved to the Romani area, it was menaced with destruction by the prevailing conditions of army life, quite apart from the activities of a flushed and aggressive enemy. At that time the equipment of the division for the great and intricate medical and sanitary work ahead of it was of the scantiest kind. Failing immediate and successful achievement by the medical service, the Sinai force would be in danger of destruction during the summer, even if the Turks did not fire a shot. Not only were the conditions of living so unfavourable, but it very soon became clear that men who rode through most of the nights, and found sleep

in the hot and fly-infested camps impossible by day, could offer only a very slight resistance to disease. Some idea of the strain of that summer on the horsemen may be gathered from the fact that between 70 and 80 per cent. of the men of the Australian force developed temporary heart trouble. To add to the menace, a great number of the troops had suffered from dysentery in the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Sand is weak in bacteriological activity, and consequently the usual arrangements for burying refuse could not be adopted. Sufficient firewood to consume the litter of great cavalry camps was out of the question; but, unless all the refuse was destroyed, there was no possibility of fighting and reducing the myriads of flies, which swarmed in the camps and threatened them with disease. The medical officers of Anzac Mounted Division, however, ably directed by Lieutenant-Colonel R. M. Downes,² attacked the problem and conquered it. Once more improvisation was the key to success. Great incinerators were constructed from thousands of empty bully beef tins, and these, cunningly arranged to ensure plenty of draught, consumed the rubbish of the Romani camps. All the refuse, before it could be burned, had to be cleared of sand by the use of sieves. Extraordinary devices were evolved to prevent the breeding of flies, and all ranks were then urged to make war on the flies which came to the camps with the supply columns and reinforcements and with troops returning from operations. Sticky substances for use on streamers were manufactured in the camps by the medical staffs. The tired troops cheerfully supported these efforts. For a time the natives of the rapidly growing Egyptian Labour Corps were strangers to sanitation; but as the war advanced their camps rapidly improved, until they were models of cleanliness. The success of the campaign against the flies, and the wholesomeness of the British camps at Romani generally during the summer, were appreciated wherever the light horse rode into camps recently evacuated by the enemy, when they were swarmed upon by clouds of flies and had their senses outraged by the offensiveness of the areas. The Turkish capacity to endure discomfort, bad

² Maj.-Gen. R. M. Downes, C.M.G., V.D. D.D.M.S., A.I.F., in Egypt, 1918/19. Surgeon; of Melbourne, Vic.; b. Mitcham, Adelaide, S. Aust., 10 Feb., 1885.

water, and filth was one of the minor wonders of the campaign. Hods which had been occupied by them could not be used by the British.

England has fought many desert campaigns; but Governments enter upon each new war with little or no consideration for the lessons of the past. The conditions of the yeomanry camp at Romani, when the light horse entered it, has been vividly described by the senior medical officer with Ryrie's brigade. "There was no sanitation at Romani," he wrote, "during the first few weeks of our occupation. The camp was found in a filthy condition; heaps of manure were lying everywhere; horse-lines were feet deep in manure. . . . The whole camp was a huge fly-breeding area. There was no means of combating the difficulties for some weeks. The troops travelled without any equipment except rifles and ammunition. There were no rakes, spades, shovels, carts, baskets, boxes, bags, or any means of moving manure. No disinfectants or fly deterrents or poisons were available. Even had these means been at hand it would have been almost impossible to find the men to do fatigues. . . . These troops had neither blankets nor bivouacs except those rapidly put together by palm-tree branches. These were useful for keeping off the intense sunrays during the day, but orders were soon received that the palm-trees were not to be cut for this or any purpose. It was considered a military necessity that all the troops at Romani should be encamped in the hod, a small area large enough scarcely for one regiment to bivouac for a day." The men, exhausted after their long rides and their almost ceaseless duty on the horse-lines, flung themselves down in heaps on the sand and won what brief and restless sleep was possible in the hot, insanitary, fly-infested camp. Rations were irregular and bad. "Supplies," says the same medical officer, "were secured with difficulty by the yet unorganised transport from railhead at Pelusium, five or six miles away, to which point they were also with difficulty transported owing to inadequate railway accommodation and arrangements. Supervision of supplies was either difficult or lax at base dépôts at Kantara or Port Said, or elsewhere; and it was a common sight to see camels coming in loaded with

quarters of beef which had the light cloth covering torn off, covered with myriads of flies, and a dirty camel-driver seated on the top of the load."

Even to exist under these conditions imposed a heavy strain on the troopers. But they had not only to exist; they were at once called upon for work of an excessively exhausting character. The first important reconnaissance was to Bir el Abd on May 7th and 8th, when they were in the saddle almost unbrokenly for about twenty-seven hours. They found Abd clear of the enemy, and the march passed without incident, although it served as a useful experience for all ranks. Arrangements for the little enterprise demonstrated Chauvel's thoroughness in preparation, and made it clear that the Turks would have to exercise much ingenuity and daring to catch the Australians as they had caught the yeomanry. The 6th and 7th Light Horse Regiments, with brigade headquarters, moved direct on Abd along the line of the telegraph wire, and the New Zealand Brigade, which temporarily moved to the Romani camp as soon as it was evacuated by the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, pushed a force out along the shore of Lake Bardawil to protect the left flank of the reconnaissance party; the 5th Light Horse Regiment took up a similar position on the right flank towards Hamisah. At Abd the Australians captured an Arab wearing a tunic and boots stripped from the yeomanry dead. The water-supply at the oasis was found to be good, with a concrete well and trough—a very rare improvement in the desert. Other wells located on the march had recently been deepened and timbered by the Turks with green palm logs, and in consequence the water was foul and bitter. All over the oasis area there was evidence that the Turks had been aiming to make the district capable of supporting a considerable army.

So far the Australians had suffered very little from the sun on the desert, whether east of the Canal or in Egypt before or after Gallipoli. Northern Sinai, despite its excessive temperatures and blinding glare from the raw sand, is seldom subjected to sustained heat. The early morning is usually still and hot, and by nine or ten o'clock the sun is burning in its intensity. But towards noon a cool breeze blows in from the Mediterranean, and the rest of the day is tolerable, while

the nights even at the height of summer are often piercingly cold. Accustomed to strong sunshine in Australia, the light horsemen for the first fortnight looked upon the climate with indifference, except for the discomfort of the camp. Very soon, however, they were taught that the grim reputation of Sinai was well founded.

A few days after the march to Abd the Australians and New Zealanders engaged in a reconnaissance to Bir el Bayud and the surrounding country to the south of Romani. At that time the only supply of drinking water was being carried in fantasses on camels from the pipehead east of the Canal. The troops were on a limited allowance, and the men of the 6th Light Horse Regiment rode out in the early morning to Bayud carrying only a quart bottle each. The heat was terrific; in a large tent at Romani the thermometer rose to 126° Fahr. Suffering acutely from thirst, many of the men soon exhausted their water-bottles, and together with their horses were showing signs of extreme distress by 10 o'clock in the morning. The regiment was then withdrawn to Hod el Baheir, and rested under the palms. During the day many men lost consciousness, and the foul water at some of the wells had to be picketed by guards with fixed bayonets to prevent the distracted troops from drinking. Fortunately the medical officers at Romani, warned by the excessive temperature, on their own initiative secured a number of ambulance camels and a supply of water and went out to succour the column. Near Katia they met stragglers from the reconnaissance party, "a few of them only apparently semi-conscious but making their way with their exhausted horses to camp at Romani."

Scores of men lay for hours round the hods at Katia and Oghratina in an unconscious condition, but sand-carts were brought up for their transport, and no lives were lost. Four officers and thirty-two troopers, however, had to be evacuated to hospital, and what was still more surprising, 500 of the horses were for some time unfit for use. On the same day the New Zealanders of the Canterbury Regiment also suffered severely. But despite all the distress, the widespread reconnaissance was fully accomplished, and much information was gained concerning the country and the water-supply. General

Murray, in a special message of appreciation of the work done that day, added that he "did not think any other troops could have undertaken the operation successfully in the present weather," and he generously expressed the same opinion in a cable sent on May 17th to the War Office. Anzac Mounted Division was already showing promise of the quality which was to distinguish it throughout the campaign. The complete dependability of the light horsemen and the New Zealanders under all conditions quickly became recognised, and towards the end of May the Commander-in-Chief in a further message of congratulation to Chauvel remarked, "Any work entrusted to these excellent troops is invariably well executed."

On the Bayud reconnaissance the Australians and New Zealanders had seen a few scattered Turks, and it was evident that the enemy, although he had withdrawn in strength from the Katia area, was keeping a close watch upon the British activities. This, owing to the wide extent of the area and to the heavy sand making the capture of his patrols very difficult, was a simple task. But the main value of these early reconnaissance to Chauvel and his men lay in the experience gained of desert conditions. After the narrow escape from disaster by thirst on May 16th, fresh arrangements were made for the supply of drinking water. Strong representations were made that all ranks should be provided with two water-bottles in place of one, and in course of time two bottles were issued. As the summer advanced, water-bags also became available for some of the men; but the most promising development was the disposition of the individual trooper to provide as far as possible for his own welfare when engaged upon operations.

This spirit of self-preservation, born at Romani, worked strongly towards the future success of the Australians and New Zealanders. The men lost no opportunity of acquiring additional water-bottles, and also small sacks for carrying extra horsefeed; they further took every chance that offered to lay by little reserves of water, tinned provisions, and fodder, until, as the campaign was continued, the average light horseman rode out upon all serious missions with probably double the normal supplies for himself and his horse. There were

instances in Palestine of a light horse brigade spending upwards of £1,000 at a single field canteen in the few hours which preceded a distant and prolonged encounter with the enemy. In Sinai, after the Bayud ordeal, all possible marches were made by night, and troops dependent upon a single water-bottle each would, despite their thirst, abstain from drinking until their objective had been reached—perhaps at noon on the following day—and the return journey commenced; and so strong is the association between mind and body in relation to thirst, that men who drank their water early in the day and were then left with an empty bottle, would collapse sooner than men who had not drunk at all and had their full bottle in reserve.

Meanwhile the 1st Light Horse Brigade had returned from the Upper Nile and crossed the Canal. On May 27th Meredith relieved the 2nd Brigade at Romani, and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Regiments in their turn learned the ways of Sinai. As the mounted men found themselves more at home upon the desert, and became expert at marching at night on compass bearings, the surprise and capture of the little Turkish posts was taken up with the keenest zest by all ranks. The first success fell to the New Zealanders, now also based on Romani, who, supported by the 1st Light Horse Regiment, enveloped a small Turkish body in the dawn of May 31st at Salmana. The enemy was surprised by the Aucklands, and suffered a loss of fifteen killed and two wounded. Those who escaped were pursued by British airmen who, flying low and dropping bombs, killed eight more Turks and twenty camels. But as a rule the Turks received ample warning from their patrols and the Bedouins, and the Anzacs after long night-rides found their camps deserted. In the operation against Salmana, artillery for the first time accompanied the mounted troops in Sinai. One gun from the Ayrshire Battery was mounted on pedrails and hauled over the rough country. The heavy sand made the transport of guns on the ordinary wheels impracticable, and for a time Chauvel was faced with a mounted campaign without artillery support. But the difficulty was overcome by the adaption of the pedrail for desert conditions. The experiment was completely successful on the Salmana raid, and afterwards guns similarly equipped accompanied the horsemen on all serious enterprises.

CHAPTER IX

AWAITING THE ENEMY

THE railway reached the Romani area in May, and Murray at once advanced the 52nd Infantry Division. With the arrival of the infantry, the British hold upon the western extremity of the oasis at Romani was considered safe for the first time since the destruction of the yeomanry in April. The position was very strong naturally, but no risks were to be taken. If Murray was shown scant consideration by the War Office in regard to an assured force of efficient troops, he was at least amply supplied with funds and material for the excavation and construction of defensive works. Great sums of money were expended on British trenches in Sinai which were never approached by the enemy. The great elaborate trench and post system east of the Canal was revetted and wired from end to end, and behind that each bridge-head was guarded by two battalions of infantry and artillery. Germany's endeavour to compel England to keep a substantial army in Egypt, and to turn a large part of her material resources from France, was succeeding admirably.

Immediately that the 52nd Division reached Romani, work was begun upon the creation of a strong line on the eastern side of the sand-dune area. Between Mahemdia on the shore of Lake Bardawil to the north, and Katib Gannit to the south, a chain of infantry posts was constructed. These were constantly improved during the summer, and, although the loose sand made trenching difficult, by the use of innumerable sand-bags and great quantities of timber, they were developed into a line well calculated to prove a sure barrier against any frontal attack the enemy might be capable of making. At the same time the railway continued to creep eastwards from Romani towards Katia, and Murray, anxious to deny Katia to the enemy, gave orders for the building of an advanced defensive line four miles to the east of the Mahemdia line. This he proposed to occupy with about 4,000 infantry; but the approach of the Turks in July led to the abandonment of the scheme and a concentration of all effort upon the defences at Romani.

If the enemy was successful in his plan to keep a large British force in Egypt, England was able to play a pretty game of bluff on the long enemy coast between Egypt and the Dardanelles. And the British game was perhaps the more effective, since it was bluff pure and simple, and gave no opportunity for retaliations, such as the German enterprise in Sinai left open to the British in the shape of a serious advance to Palestine. Early in 1915, before the attack at Gallipoli was decided upon, and again after the Evacuation, proposals were made to land a British force in the Gulf of Iskanderun, and to advance from there against the Baghdad railway with a view to the isolation of the Turks in Palestine, Arabia, and Mesopotamia. Eight divisions were deemed necessary for the operation; but, owing to the opposition of the French to British intervention in territory which they considered to be their sphere of influence, the enterprise was abandoned. The proposal is worth recalling as an example of Germany's advantage in being able to exercise absolute authority in the councils of the Central Powers, in contrast to the divided control on the Allied side.

During April the War Office informed Murray that the Russians were pressing the British Government to take some action in the neighbourhood of Alexandretta, with a view to diverting the Turks from Transcaucasia. It was obvious that the enemy should be kept alive to the possibility of a landing on the Mediterranean coast, with a direct menace, if possible, to the Baghdad railway. Such a policy would not only relieve the Russians but would also affect Turkish operations in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Murray was therefore instructed to engage in a realistic bluff near Alexandretta, and a battalion of infantry accompanied by staff officers was sent to Cyprus. These troops landed on the island and at once proceeded to lay out a camp for a force 100,000 strong. At the same time the Navy put down buoys marking a channel for the approach of transports; enquiries were made about supplies; British seaplanes flying over the adjoining mainland dropped messages in simple cypher ostensibly addressed to Allied agents, seeking information about enemy strength in the locality and about the suitability of the coast for a landing. The Turks and Germans responded immediately to the bait; enemy aeroplanes

patrolled over the scene of British activities in Cyprus, and attention was given to the shore defences.

In schemes of this kind the enemy suspects the real motive, but he cannot be sure; afraid to run a risk, he is compelled to take precautions which amount to a tactical victory for the other side. The anxiety of the enemy as to the power of the British Navy was clearly demonstrated throughout the war on this coast. From Jaffa to Tripoli the British on their advance discovered extensive Turkish defences facing the coast; in some places, as at Haifa and Beirut, the Turks went to great labour to put powerful long-range guns in commanding positions, and to keep them there; and a substantial enemy garrison was forced into perpetual inactivity. But the British were not alone in these feints from the sea. While Murray's staff were chuckling over the demonstration at Alexandretta, news arrived from the War Office that the enemy was reported to have landed 4,000 Turks and 400 Germans on the African coast west of Egypt, and that this force was moving towards Sollum. Submarines were believed to have been used for the transport of the troops, who were said to aim at an attack on the Nile. The report was groundless, but it served the enemy as the Cyprus scheme had served the British.

While aeroplanes facilitate the movement of their own cavalry, they may, as they are multiplied and improved in future wars, cripple the use of the enemy's mounted arm by their bombing activities. Horse-lines present an unrivalled target to airmen, as they cannot easily be protected by excavation or other cover. Had the enemy aircraft been as powerful on this front as it was in France, the achievements of Chauvel's cavalry might have been entirely different. The 1st Light Horse Brigade reached Romani on May 30th, and occupied the congested camp evacuated by the exhausted troops of Ryrie's brigade. At half-past 6 on the morning of June 1st an enemy aeroplane flew over the camp and dropped eight bombs from a height of about 8,000 feet. The aim was sure, and most of the bombs fell among the troops and their horse-lines. The horses had not previously been under fire, and they immediately stampeded, broke their ropes in large numbers, and scattered at the gallop over the sand-hills. The

Australian casualties were severe. One officer and seven men were killed, three officers and nineteen men wounded, and thirty-six horses killed and nine wounded. The horses, frantic with fear, galloped for many miles; a few reached Port Said, nearly thirty miles away, and some were never recovered. At that time the British force had no anti-aircraft guns, and its flying arm was for long afterwards inferior to the enemy in number of pilots and speed of machines. Recognising that the mounted camps could only be protected by superiority in the air, Murray continued to beg the War Office for an efficient air service; but not until he had left Egypt and General Allenby¹ had taken over the command was the request heeded.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Brigadier-General J. M. Antill² had remained all the summer in No. 2 Section to the south, where the regiments had been in occupation of trenches and had also kept the country to the east under constant observation on horseback. They had seen little or nothing of the enemy, but their task in the heat had been heavy and exacting. The flood observed in the Wady um Muksheib during the Jifjafa raid in April had an important bearing upon the defence of the central and southern sections of the Canal. Many ancient stone cisterns sunk beside the bed of the wady to catch the occasional waters had been filled, and a number of large pools remained along the water-course. These were estimated to contain several million gallons, and, as they were only from thirty to forty miles eastward of the Canal, served to create a point of concentration for an enemy force striking at Egypt by the central Sinai route.

Murray ordered the destruction of these supplies, and the work was entrusted to Lieutenant-Colonel T. J. Todd³ of the 10th Australian Light Horse, an accountant from Western Australia and a soldier of conspicuous energy and organising capacity. Todd marched out from the defensive line on June

¹ Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., p.s.c. High Commissioner for Egypt, 1919/25. Of Felixstowe, Suffolk, Eng.; b. Brackenburch, Southwell, Notts, Eng., 23 Apr., 1861. Died, 14 May, 1936.

² Maj.-Gen. J. M. Antill, C.B., C.M.G. Commanded 2nd Inf. Bde. 1916. Of Jarvisfield, Picton, N.S.W.; b. Picton, 26 Jan., 1866. Died, 1 March, 1937.

³ Lieut.-Col. T. J. Todd, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 10th L.H. Regt., 1915/19; 3rd L.H. Bde. temporarily, 1918. Accountant, of Subiaco, Perth, W. Aust., and Auckland, N.Z., b. Christchurch, N.Z., 2 March 1873. Died of illness, 23 Jan., 1919.

10th with a force made up of two squadrons of his own regiment and the three squadrons of the 9th, while a body of Middlesex yeomanry at the same time proceeded to the cisterns at Moiya Harab. The Australians, working with hand pumps, first emptied the cisterns at Gebel um Mukhsheib; on the 12th a squadron went to the assistance of the yeomanry. The force then concentrated upon the large pools in the bed of the wady, which were contained in pockets of clay brought down by the floods. By the use of explosives and deep channels cut through the clay the water was drawn off into the sand. Heavy labour carried on over three days of blinding heat denied the enemy about 5,000,000 gallons of water, and the cisterns were sealed to prevent their refilling.

Throughout June the 1st Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealanders continued the reconnaissance of the water area to the east and south of Romani. Agents and airmen reported an increased number of troops in southern Palestine, and Murray began to entertain hopes that the Turks would serve his plans and advance upon the Romani position. All the intelligence, too, pointed to the abandonment by the enemy of any menace to the Canal over the central Sinai route. Murray's activity against the limited water-supply in the bed of the Wady um Muksheib and in isolated wells had been effective. The Turks must, if they attacked at all in 1916, attack by the northern oasis route, across which Romani jutted in all its natural and rapidly increasing military strength. History scarcely presents an example of such complete conformity by an enemy taking the offensive to the plans and wishes of the defenders. At Romani Murray and his leaders in the field anticipated in detail the course followed by the Turks. This must be remembered in considering the action which followed.

The only alternative to the storming of Romani was an advance through the fringe of the oasis country to the south. The enemy, if he came that way, would either strike straight on for the Canal, or, as was more probable, would swing northwards after passing Romani and aim at the communications between Romani and Kantara. Murray considered the direct blow at the Canal highly improbable; but Lawrence, who was in command of No. 3 Section and on whom fell the

actual local responsibility, was not disposed to take risks in regard to it. Murray seems to have given Lawrence a very free hand. He was throughout the campaign generous in his confidence in his advanced leaders, and it cannot be said that his generosity was always rewarded.

June passed quietly. Over the reconnaissance area the Turks were discovered in constant observation, but in no strength, and the chief activity of the mounted troops was in the pursuit and capture of the prying Bedouins. Early in July the 2nd Light Horse Brigade returned from its brief rest at Hill 70 and joined the 1st Brigade at Romani. The 52nd Division occupied the line of posts from Mahemdia to Katib Gannit, protecting Romani from the east. The New Zealanders, and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade, supported by the Somerset and Leicester Batteries, were between Romani and the Canal, while west of the waterway the 42nd Division was completing its organisation. In July, therefore, Lawrence had immediately available for the defence of No. 3 Section two divisions of infantry, one complete, and one nearing completion, and four brigades of horse. The strength of the enemy was not definitely known, but it was never feared that he could at the height of summer bring a force exceeding 25,000 across the heavy sand.

The Australians and New Zealanders, if showing signs of wear, were now in prime fighting condition. Officers and men were familiar with the wide zone of operations to the east and south; the constant riding and heavy work of improving the wells and digging trenches for the infantry at Katib Gannit, together with the extremely harsh living, had caused numbers to be evacuated through illness; and the men who remained were all of superior constitution and worthy to do battle with the hardy enemy under desert conditions. Officers became extraordinarily expert in leading their men across the country in the dark. Even by daylight the sand-dunes and the intervening areas of harder undulating country are scarcely more marked by distinguishing objects than the waters of the sea; by night the ground was devoid of indications of locality, and the long, black, silent columns sneaking across the desert were led solely by the stars. A good example of this night work is provided by a movement of the 5th Light Horse

Regiment on the right flank. Aeroplanes had reported about fifty Turks at Bir el Jefeir. The regiment moved out on June 26th at 10 o'clock at night, and, dividing into three parties, each making an independent estimate of the distance and each marching on an individual compass-bearing, aimed to form a half-circle east of the post before dawn. Jefeir is "a hole in the ground," a native well without trees about it. The three parties were out of touch for hours. They hoped to be in position at 3.30 in the morning, and a quarter of an hour earlier each body was on its appointed ground. They rushed the post at dawn, but the Turks, as usual, had been warned and were gone. The supporting aeroplane then reported an enemy party with camels two miles to the east. The regiment gave chase over heavy sand and captured twenty Bedouins and 105 camels; but the Turks, favoured by the country, escaped.

By this time the horses were in the same hard condition as their riders; but the country was almost impossible for their effective use, and during all the preliminary reconnaissances, as in the pursuit after Romani, the sand made a sound cavalry pace impracticable. If the enemy parties on foot had a start of a few hundred yards, they had very little difficulty in getting away.

On July 9th the 6th Light Horse Regiment, after a fruitless brigade reconnaissance to Bir el Abd, surprised a post of seventeen Turks towards Salmana at 4 o'clock in the morning. Three of the enemy were captured, but the heavy sand enabled the remainder to escape. The same day a party of the 1st Light Horse Brigade reached Romani with the engine of a dismantled British aeroplane which had crashed in the desert—a fine piece of transport. When the two brigades were not probing the country for Turks, they engaged in great sweeps of the country in the endeavour to comb it clean of spying Bedouins. Riding forward in columns at night, they opened out at daylight into wide screens, and returned towards Romani. A few natives were captured, but most of them were too fleet and wily to fall into the net.

When the light horse left Australia, they were equipped with two machine-guns to each regiment. As more arms became available from England, a corresponding change was

gradually made in organisation. During July the machine-guns were taken from the regiments, and each brigade was given a machine-gun squadron with eight officers and 221 other ranks and twelve Maxim guns, which were replaced by Vickers later in the campaign. This doubled the machine-gun power of each brigade. At the same time three Lewis guns were issued to each regiment. About a year later the Lewis guns were withdrawn, and twelve Hotchkiss .303-in. guns issued to each regiment. These changes greatly increased the effectiveness of the brigades; the regiments were made stronger in themselves, and the machine-gun squadrons proved invaluable in many fights, giving covering fire to the advancing line in dismounted attacks. The machine-guns were carried into action on pack-horses, and were frequently used as advance-guards on the flanks. Their teams became so expert that the guns frequently opened fire in less than one minute after the men got the order to halt their galloping horses; and the rapidity with which they moved from position to position had a disconcerting effect upon the enemy.

Meanwhile the complexity and weakness of Murray's position as Commander-in-Chief in Egypt was disclosed to an interesting degree by his communications with the War Office in the month of June. On June 15th Sherif Hussein formally declared war against the Turks, and six days later he had captured Mecca and taken upwards of 1,100 prisoners. He then commenced urgently to press Murray for a supply of mountain batteries, a howitzer battery, mobile ambulances, and arms and equipment generally. On June 29th the War Office in a despatch to Murray pointed out that the Arab rising had developed considerably, and had strengthened the arguments in favour of Murray's pushing forward to Akaba and El Arish in due course. Murray had estimated that the force required for the two operations would be five divisions of infantry and his mounted brigades. Lord Kitchener replied that he doubted if he could spare more than four infantry divisions for the work. The War Office at the same time urged the Commander-in-Chief to push the railway forward as rapidly as possible to El Arish, thus showing that they had accepted Sir Archibald's original scheme of advance. The Foreign Office was asked to press the High Commissioner in

Egypt to place all his resources in labour and material at Murray's disposal, and Murray was instructed to consult Admiral Wemyss as to what assistance he would be able to give in operations against Akaba. Murray replied that he would push the railway as far as the labour and material he had in hand would permit, and would then accumulate supplies for a further effort.

Murray made strong representations during June to the War Office concerning the quality of the British troops under his command. He pointed out that the Territorials of his two divisions, the 42nd and 52nd, were inferior in quality not only to regulars but also to the new troops enlisted since the war. The War Office policy of considering subsidiary operations, such as the war against the Turks, only after the Western Front had taken all that was best of British resources, was illustrated in an exchange of despatches following upon the application by Murray for a "young, vigorous officer" to lead the 52nd Division. Murray complained that the War Office offered him three generals, one of whom had lost his command because his nerves had broken down, while the two others in his opinion were "entirely unsuitable." Under the circumstances Murray was fortunate to secure in Major-General W. E. B. Smith⁴ a leader for the 52nd Division with whom he was well satisfied.

Reference has already been made to Murray's poor opinion of the officers of the yeomanry up to this time. In June he advised the War Office that "the bulk of the yeomanry officers are ignorant of the rudiments of mounted work." He asked to be given at least three good cavalry officers for each regiment, and said that if this were done he would make drastic changes among the higher ranks of the yeomanry officers. "In any serious mounted work," he added, "I rely entirely on my Anzac Mounted Division, who are excellent under hard conditions." But the British leader, while showing the greatest concern as to both the number and quality of his troops, was still exercising the utmost generosity towards the Western Front. When he was asked about this time to release one of the five infantry divisions still remaining in Egypt,

⁴ Maj-Gen W. E. B. Smith, C B, C M G. Officer of British Regular Army, of Suffolk County, Eng; b. London, Eng., 29 March, 1867.

and was permitted to make the selection, he thanked the War Office for the compliment, and replied that he was sending the 11th Division, which was "the best that he had."

A remarkable change took place in the spirit of the War Office during the course of the first half of 1916. In March the British Government was frankly uneasy about the position at Verdun, and apparently also about the general temper of the French people. Gallipoli had failed, Mesopotamia was going badly, and the submarine menace was increasing. The War Office was depressed and anxious; it was not only hostile to Murray's ambitious project of advancing on El Arish, but was at that time urging the evacuation of Salonika. But by the middle of the year the situation of the Allies had greatly improved. The Germans had failed at Verdun after suffering destructive losses, and the French victory had not only rekindled the patriotism and ardour of France, but had cheered the heart of every Allied soldier on the Western Front. Haig was preparing his great attack on the Somme, and the Russians were again fighting strongly. A more optimistic view was taken of the position in Mesopotamia. The Arab was harassing the Turk in the Hejaz, and threatened to be a heavy additional burden upon the enemy's already strained resources. The assured intervention of Roumania led to a reconsideration of the Salonika operations; England was now prepared to prosecute the campaign in the Balkans, and, with characteristic inconsistency in dealing with subsidiary operations, was urging Murray in Egypt to do what a few months before had been strongly discouraged.

But Murray's position had changed substantially between February and June. He had sent away from Egypt no less than 200,000 troops, and was now reduced to four weak Territorial divisions and a few mounted brigades, which had to cover a front of some 800 miles on the western desert and ninety miles east of the Canal. Loyal to a remarkable degree to the War Office, he had unselfishly given to France (as he admitted) "everything of real fighting value," with the exception of his mounted Anzacs; and he was now complaining about the quality of the divisional commanders offered to him, the inexperience of his infantry rank and file, and the inefficiency of his yeomanry officers. Having been

reduced to a state of military destitution, he was now urged to advance on El Arish and Akaba. His protests and fears met with little consideration at the confident War Office, which glibly assured the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt that "as long as the Turks prosecute their campaign in Armenia and Mesopotamia, there does not seem to be a great probability that the Turkish forces in southern Syria will be seriously reinforced."

In fairness to the War Office, however, it might be pointed out that at this time Germany was increasing its demands upon Turkey's already diminished and overworked fighting power. The 19th and 20th Turkish Divisions were on their way to Galicia as the XV Corps, while the 15th, 25th, and 26th Divisions as the VI Corps were sent a little later to Roumania, and at the end of the year the 50th and 46th Divisions went to Bulgaria. This increasing employment of Ottoman troops in Europe was probably well known to Whitehall, and it was obviously good policy to increase British activities further east.

Murray officially placed on record the complaint that his strength was below what he had asked for if he was to occupy El Arish; he then proceeded to obey the ill-informed orders from England. He adopted a definite policy for his three sections of the Canal defences. In the Suez (No. 1 or southern Section) and Ismailia (No. 2 or central Section) the position was now considered reasonably safe. After the destruction of the water-supplies along the Wady um Muksheib, Murray was quite willing to allow the Turks, if they crossed central Sinai, to debouch from the defiles on their way towards Egypt, knowing that they would have a long waterless stretch of exceedingly rough country behind them. In the northern or Katia (No. 3) Section his policy was to be "actively offensive" with a view to the control of the water area, so as to prevent the enemy from assembling any considerable force there, and then in the following autumn or winter to advance to El Arish.

By July 12th railhead had reached a point half-way between Romani and Katia. Since January fifty miles of broad-gauge railway had been constructed eastwards of Sallhia, in addition to a light line along the coast from Port Said to

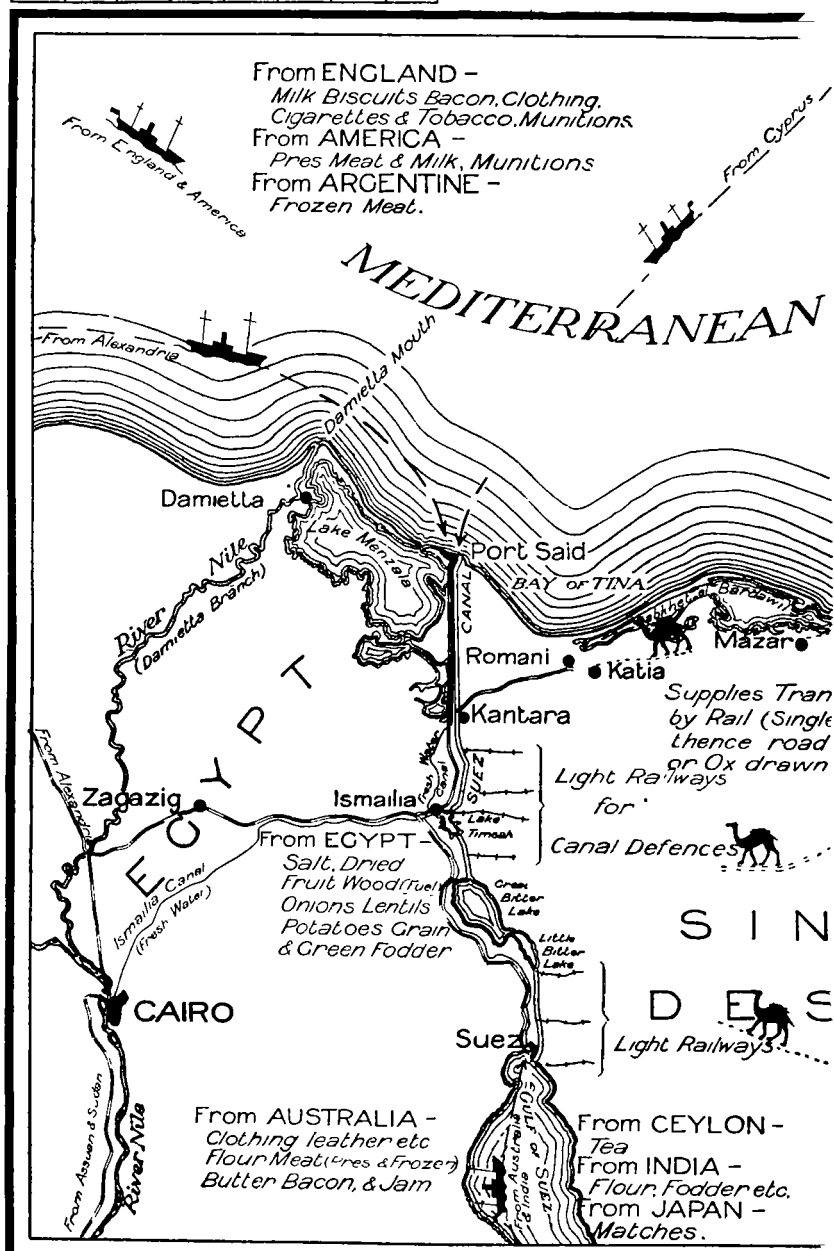
Mahemdia. Material was available to continue the broad-gauge railway to Oghratina, which Murray hoped would be occupied at an early date. The water problem, however, although simple enough for the mounted forces after the horses became accustomed to the brackish supply of the desert, presented the greatest difficulty to the advance of the infantry. "The Territorial divisions are improving," said a General Headquarters comment at this time, "but they are undoubtedly indifferent, immobile troops requiring more nursing than other regular or new troops." In other words, they required more water on Sinai than more experienced soldiers, and were not likely to be effective in the hot and thirsty desert. Attempts to find good drinking water in Sinai by boring to a depth had completely failed; there was no alternative but to follow the army across the desert with a pipe-line bearing the filtered water of the Sweet Water Canal. By July the engineering achievements had, in Sir Archibald's opinion, "far exceeded any previous desert warfare work, remembering that no Nile River is available."

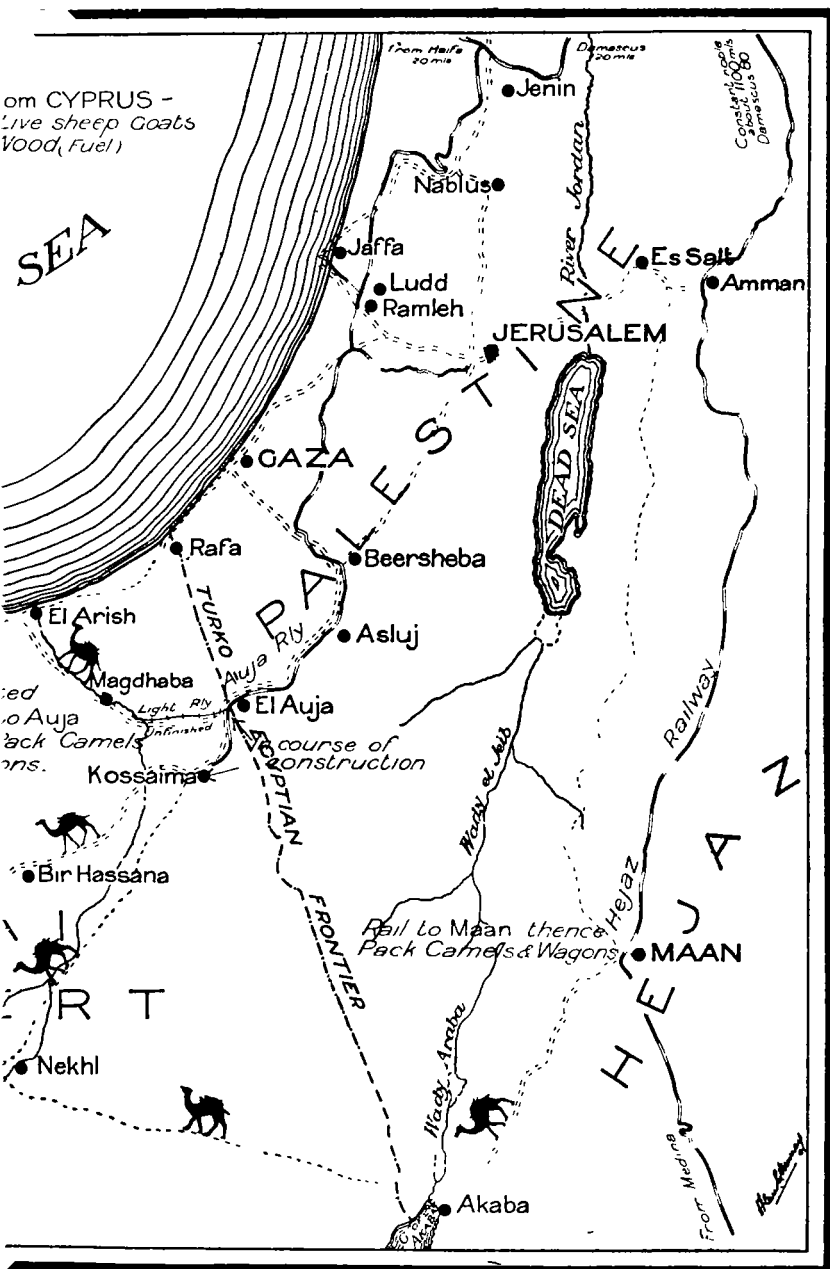
The prospect was not a cheerful one; but Murray, having no alternative, urged General Lawrence on the Katia section to "press forward the advance with the greatest possible energy and rapidity consistent with avoidance of undue military risk." And then, lest Lawrence should entertain expectations as to reinforcements, Murray added, "There is no prospect of increasing your strength beyond two weak Territorial divisions, one dismounted brigade, and the mounted troops." The plan laid down for Lawrence was (1) to make the occupation of the Romani-Mahemdia area secure, (2) to occupy the eastern portion of the Katia area, and so enable the mounted troops working through that position to guard the oasis as a whole within the limits of one day's ride.

Lawrence in reply to these orders pointed out that the position had changed since April, when the enemy had demonstrated that he could rapidly place a force of 4,000 men and a few light guns as far west as Katia. There were now about 28,000 Turkish troops in southern Palestine and Sinai. It was certain that the enemy was closely watching the British advance, and, given a reasonable chance, might at any

SCALE OF MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

MAP





time attempt to overwhelm the head of the advance. The opposing forces were then forty miles apart, and Lawrence believed the Turks could at any time put 15,000 men within a week as far west as Oghratina and strike a rapid blow followed by a rapid retirement. Lawrence also drew attention to the degree to which his line of communications was open from Mageibra as he pushed east. The Turk would naturally be alive to the British dependence upon the railway and the water-pipe, and would raid them if possible.

CHAPTER X

THE TURKISH ADVANCE

LAWRENCE was anything but enthusiastic about the prospects of a hurried British advance. But while he was expressing his doubts and fears, the outlook was changed in dramatic fashion by the advance of the enemy. Murray's design to fight upon his own chosen ground at Romani was to be fulfilled to a degree rare in warfare.

On the evening of July 18th the country to the east of Romani had been declared clear of the enemy, except for small parties, both by the British airmen and the light horse reconnaissance. On the following day Chaytor, of the New Zealand Brigade, made a detailed personal reconnaissance by aeroplane of the eastern part of the oasis area. Flying over the 2nd Light Horse Brigade between Romani and Katia at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he dropped a message to say that he had seen approximately 3,000 enemy and 2,000 camels at Bayud, from 1,500 to 2,000 men and 1,000 camels at Bir Jameil, and a further 3,000 to 3,500 at Bir el Abd. A Turkish force many thousands strong had covered by night marches the relatively waterless stretch, some fifty miles in extent, between El Arish and the oasis area, and had succeeded in concealing itself from aircraft observation during the day. The enemy had advanced in conformity with British anticipations, and was apparently closing upon Romani. As the news became known to the light horsemen, there was a burst of elation at the prospect of a decisive conflict which would put an end to the prolonged, exhausting, and fruitless work of patrol.

Anzac Mounted Division at once took steps preliminary to action. All leave was stopped, and absent officers and men were recalled to their regiments. During the first fortnight of July the wastage caused by exhaustion had been heavy. Each day the "sick parades" of men utterly spent by fatigue grew larger. But on the morning of July 20th, the day after Chaytor's reconnaissance, the regimental medical officers found themselves idle. Then, as on the eve of all serious

operations during the campaign, light horsemen who could climb into their saddles had "no time for the M.O." One day's reserve supplies for the mounted brigades were ordered up to Romani. On the night of July 19th the patrols of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade exchanged shots with the enemy screen near Oghratina, and the Turks were located in strength on high ground east and south-east of Hod Abu Rodha. During the following day the enemy was seen to be hastily entrenching on the Oghratina ridge, and to be holding the old yeomanry camp there. Supported by a section of the Ayrshire Battery, the 2nd Light Horse Brigade demonstrated near Oghratina in the afternoon, and drew fire from rifles, machine-guns, and one mountain gun. Next day—the 21st—the 1st Light Horse Brigade demonstrated again at Oghratina, and further south at Hod el Sagia. Each time the Turks launched a spirited counter-attack, and the Australians, who had orders not to become engaged, were withdrawn without loss.

The two Australian brigades were now committed to the long series of reconnaissances against the advancing enemy, which continued from July 20th to August 3rd, and terminated in the decisive Romani engagement. The mounted troops were to feel and hinder the enemy advance as much as possible, at the same time running no risk of surprise and disaster. Each brigade would move from camp before 2 o'clock on alternate mornings, march on the morning star as far as the Katia district, and bivouac till dawn. The regiments would then ride out over a wide front to the east and south-east, and advance until they came under enemy fire. If the Turks were not in force, they would be pushed back until their resistance stiffened; then, unless the enemy counter-attacked, the light horse would remain for the day in observation. If the enemy countered in strength, the Australians would fall back slowly, disputing the ground as stoutly as possible without becoming actually involved.

At nightfall the brigade would return to Romani, which was usually reached shortly before midnight. On withdrawal it left behind a light chain of officers' patrols, each made up of an officer and a few men, to endeavour to watch enemy movement in the darkness. These patrols were, in effect, mobile

listening posts; in no circumstances were they to fire upon the enemy. The work imposed an extremely sharp strain on those engaged in it. The sand muffled all noise made by the Turkish infantry, but the Australians' horses, nervous in the stillness of the night, frequently neighed, and brought the men under fire at close range. Often the patrols, discovering that Turkish parties had advanced past them on either side, had exciting little adventures in picking their way out without being discovered by the enemy. On July 29th Captain N. M. Pearce,¹ of the 6th Light Horse Regiment, while engaged on this work, was shot dead by a sniper; and his three men, with the Turks between them and Romani, had to make their way in the night through enemy forces to the south, and finally reported at Hill 70.

The alternate brigade marched out from Romani soon after the other had returned, and thus half the mounted force at the camp was kept constantly moving. Having watered their horses after their return, the men would dig up their blankets from the sand, where they had buried them for safe keeping in their absence (blankets were scarce and in demand at the time), and then snatch a brief sleep until they were summoned to stand to arms an hour before dawn. Then came the fierce sun and the flies and the work of the stables, with very little opportunity for rest during the day. Soon after midnight they were again on the move. Under this pressure both men and horses lost condition. The sun, beating from the sky and striking back from the desert, gave the wiry light horsemen the appearance of old leather. "We were as black as the Bedouins," wrote one of them, "and quite as hardy." The long campaign was attended by various forms of minor sickness, each peculiar to certain localities, and at about this time the troops suffered from what, in characteristic Australian language, they called the "Barcoo Spew." Men apparently in sound health would suddenly be overcome with nausea, and be very ill for perhaps half-an-hour, after which they would completely recover. But, despite the strain, the brigades were animated by the highest spirits. At last the dream of their soldier-lives, an engagement in the open, seemed likely to be

¹ Capt. N. M. Pearce, 6th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Kellyville, N.S.W.; b "Stanhope," Kellyville, N.S.W., 6 Jan., 1881. Killed in action, 29 July, 1916.

realised, and most days were marked by minor lively enterprises. They were taking the desert campaign with very light hearts.

Meanwhile the 'Turks were feverishly engaged in digging a defensive line, which in places they covered with a few strands of barbed wire. By the evening of July 25th they had established a strong position, which they continued steadily to push forward in an irregular line conforming to the scattered palm hods. They had also a system of small posts about half-a-mile in front of their position, and their snipers were scattered freely through the bushes and hummocks. Their line ran roughly from Hod el Negiliat in the north, through Oghratina to a point near Hod el Metiana in the south, a distance of about six miles. Active thrusts from day to day by the light horse yielded a few prisoners, who were useful for identification purposes and for information. While the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades maintained pressure on the main enemy front, the New Zealand Brigade (including the 5th Light Horse Regiment) was active on the right flank, and maintained a standing day and night patrol overlooking Mageibra.

It will be remembered that, on the original advance of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade to the support of the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, the 5th Light Horse Regiment had proceeded to Dueidar, and had become detached from Ryrie's command. Remaining there for some time for service on the right flank of the Romani force, the regiment was temporarily attached to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade under Chaytor, and in its place the Wellington Regiment passed under Ryrie's command. This arrangement was continued until after the Romani operations, and the close association did much to quicken and strengthen the bond between the New Zealanders and the light horse.

During this advance the individual Turk displayed indifferent qualities as a mobile fighter. The broken nature of the ground, even off the sand-dunes, and the many tufted hillocks gave him good cover against the approach of the light horse patrols, and the Australians often blundered into his screen. A squadron of the 7th Regiment, advancing between Oghratina and Sagia, suddenly found themselves among a superior

force of the enemy. The Turks snatched at their bridles and, as the Australians galloped out, opened a heavy fire. But, as was so often noted when they were surprised, their shooting was wild, and the squadron suffered no casualties. Another day a squadron of the same regiment, under Major J. D. Richardson,² encountered a superior force of Turks in the same unexpected manner. The Australians broke away for two or three hundred yards, dismounted, and fired at the Turks as they advanced; then mounted, rode again for a few hundred yards, and again came into action. This was repeated several times; at one halt the Australians impudently boiled their "quarts" and made tea as the Turks toiled up to them. Such incidents, slight in themselves, had a useful effect in stimulating the spirit of the horsemen.

On the unexpected appearance of the enemy, Murray at once abandoned for the time any thought of the advance towards El Arish, and decided to stand securely based on the railhead and camps behind the infantry string of posts at Romani. This ensured an easy line of communication and abundant supplies, in addition to the most intimate knowledge of the prospective battleground. Sir Archibald had visited Romani early in July, and General Lawrence had frequently been over the ground. The Commander-in-Chief then handed the situation over to Lawrence, but expressed the opinion that the reserve troops should be advanced as far east of the Canal as supplies would permit. Lawrence, however, was strong in the belief that the enemy might leave Romani on his right flank and strike for the communications closer to the Canal, or direct for the Canal itself; he was therefore reluctant to push forward the 42nd Division. Moreover, he did not consider the transport facilities yet able to support a larger force in the advanced area.

Murray was frankly cheerful about the appearance of the Turks, and his only anxiety was that they might remain on their existing line and abstain from a further advance. In a message to Lawrence he said he "understood" it was Lawrence's intention to draw the enemy, if possible, on to the prepared defences extending from the Romani position to the

² Maj.-Gen. J. D. Richardson, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 7th L.H. Regt. 1918/19. Grazier, b. Raymond Terrace, N.S.W., 23 Apr., 1880.

Canal, and not to strike with the cavalry until the Turks were engaged against those defences. "If the enemy can be induced to come in," he added, "it is to our advantage to allow him to do so, and not to launch our mobile striking force until he gets committed against the Romani defences." Lawrence was at that time in agreement with his leader as to the Turkish intention. "Generally," he wrote on July 20th, "everything points to a movement against Romani from Oghratina, combined with his main movement against the southern flank of the position and the railway line between Katib Gannit and Dueidar, with a possible attack on the latter place. Our forces are well disposed to meet this. The 52nd Division brigades will be completed at Romani-Mahemdia by soon after midnight (of 20th), and General Smith has two battalions of the 42nd Division in addition. The horses of the Anzac Mounted Division have been kept fresh, and should be capable of vigorous action. Five batteries are in position or are available for mobile action with these two divisions." The three brigades of the 52nd Division (the 155th, 156th, 157th), with the 158th Brigade of the 53rd Division attached, contained at that time 589 officers and 12,896 other ranks. Their mobile fighting strength was about 7,000 rifles; and, as the men had escaped all the hard preliminary work which fell upon the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, they should have been fresh and in good condition.

In a further message to Lawrence, on July 21st, the Commander-in-Chief said:—"I should like Chauvel to let the Turks get well involved by losing touch and direction between Katib Gannit and Dueidar before striking. We must capture and destroy all we can. Tell General Smith there is a golden rule, and that is not to launch counter-attacks too soon. If possible, let the enemy reserve become involved." Murray, whose anticipation of the Romani operations all through was exceptionally correct, discussed with Lawrence the latter's personal conduct of the pending battle. Lawrence had his headquarters at Kantara, twenty-three miles from Romani, and Murray suggested that this was too far away, and that he should go forward. The point was whether he "considered it advisable either to establish a forward post of command, or to delegate the charge of operations from Mahemdia-Romani

to a single subordinate commander, so as to ensure complete co-operation." Murray had correctly sensed the weak spot in Lawrence's arrangements, but was, unfortunately, content to "suggest," and refrained from expressing his opinion in a definite order. No steps were taken to ensure concerted action between the Anzac Mounted Division and the 52nd Infantry Division under General Smith, which occupied the posts covering Romani. Lawrence preferred to leave the issue open, and to act according to developments, with the belief that he would have opportunity and sufficient time to direct any serious action by telephone from his headquarters at Kantara, twenty-three miles away.

Meanwhile, on July 20th, the New Zealand Brigade was detached from Chauvel's command and, together with four squadrons of the 5th Yeomanry Brigade, was formed into a body known as "Section Mounted Troops"⁸ under Chaytor, who was to take his orders direct from Lawrence. This force, which was based on Hill 70, was supported by the Leicester and Somerset Royal Horse Artillery Batteries, and, in addition to the New Zealand Machine Gun Squadron, was given six machine-guns from the 5th Yeomanry Brigade. Its immediate function was to discover and harass the enemy's approaching left flank; if the attack developed, it was to operate against that flank generally.

At the same time Lawrence directed his attention to the final preparation and advance of the 42nd Division from the west of the Canal. This division, which was made up of the 125th, 126th, and 127th (East Lancashire Territorial) Brigades, was in no condition for the rigorous work of the desert at the height of summer. The troops were soft and raw, and orders from Lawrence showed consciousness of their disabilities. On July 20th, when the two leading battalions reached Kantara, the division was warned that the troops "must be prepared to march with a minimum of water. Water discipline is of the utmost importance, and men should not be allowed to drink from their bottles until they have marched four miles."

Each day the enemy strengthened and advanced his position. But it was still uncertain whether he intended to assault,

⁸ That is, mounted troops allotted to Lawrence's section of the Canal Defences.

or whether he would establish himself permanently across the oasis country from about Oghratina to Mageibra, and throw on Murray the choice of merely holding an opposing line or taking the offensive against his trenches. Skirmishing became more frequent. The light horsemen pushed in with great boldness as they appreciated the indifferent quality of the Turkish riflemen. On July 28th two squadrons of the New Zealanders dashed into the line at Hod um Ugba, captured eight prisoners, inflicted about thirty casualties, and escaped at a cost of one killed and two wounded. Each day, as the light horsemen rode forward, they discovered that the enemy had made more or less headway during the night.

The captured prisoners had talked freely, and from them and intelligence generally a very precise estimate was made of the number, identity, and quality of the enemy force. The advancing Turks were troops of the 3rd Division, which formed part of the I Turkish Army Corps. They were chiefly Anatolians, among the best troops in the Ottoman Empire. Coming, however, from a country favoured by a good rainfall, they were perhaps not so well suited for the hardship of existing upon an evil and scanty supply of brackish well-water. The 3rd Division, made up of the 31st, 32nd, and 39th Regiments, had served upon Gallipoli, from which it was withdrawn in the previous September. It had arrived in southern Palestine about the end of January, and one of its regiments had taken part in the brilliant Turkish raid against the yeomanry. The regiments were strong in machine-guns manned by Germans, and the British troops were specially instructed to seek out and, if possible, destroy their teams. The 23rd Turkish Division, composed chiefly of Syrians, was at this time scattered about the garrisons of Sinai, and it was thought that part of this division might be with the 3rd. The Syrians, however, had always proved very inferior fighters, and it was not considered likely that the Turks would entrust them with serious participation in an important offensive movement.

The enemy force was now about 100 miles from its railhead. The Turks were dependent upon a very limited camel-train, bearing ammunition and grain for the troops, and herds of miscellaneous cattle driven for meat, and condemned by the

desert to a very brief existence. They relied for water upon the brackish wells in the hods. It was not surprising, therefore, that the prisoners taken in the preliminary skirmishes, besides being footsore from forced marches on the hot sand, were already apparently very low in spirit, and that they begged pitifully for food and fresh water.

Towards the end of July, Antill's 3rd Light Horse Brigade was moved north to Bally Bunion, where, under Lawrence's direct command, it was to operate on the right flank of the Romani troops in the event of a Turkish attack. Antill was an Australian regular soldier, who, like all the light horse leaders, had seen service upon Gallipoli. This was his first essay in desert warfare. A severe disciplinarian, he attracted notice at Anzac for the particular excellence of the trenches on his sector; but he lacked, perhaps, that native sense of mounted work, and that close sympathy with the men, which distinguished the leaders of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse and the New Zealand Brigades.

At the same time Murray was urging the completion of still another mounted body, a composite Australian and British force on horses and camels under Lieutenant-Colonel C. L. Smith, V.C.,⁴ who had orders, if the Turks advanced, to operate from No. 2 Section against their extreme left flank, in touch, if possible, with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Antill. Two monitors stationed off the coast to the north were given orders to be in readiness to bombard the right flank of the enemy about Oghratina.

As July drew to a close, Murray and Chauvel appear to have been quite convinced that the Turks, if they advanced, would march immediately south of the line of infantry posts, passing them without direct attack; and that then, swinging north over the sand-hills, they would strike at the Romani camps and the railway behind the infantry positions. Lawrence, as his despatch on July 20th shows, shared this belief; but he was not disposed to overlook the strong possibility of the main blow from the enemy falling further to the west, and even directly upon the Canal. He realised, however, that the immediate menace was to the camps and the railway

⁴ Brig.-Gen. C. Leslie Smith, V.C., M.C. Officer of British Regular Army; of Isle of Wight, Eng.; b. Romsey, Hampshire, Eng., 17 Jan., 1878. Died, 14 Dec., 1927.

close behind Romani. He felt little concern about a frontal attack on Smith's line of infantry posts from Mahemdia to Katib Gannit. The danger-point was on the southern and south-eastern flank, and he conferred with Chauvel as to adequate protection in that direction. Chauvel, therefore, in the closing days of July, examined in detail the country immediately south of Katib Gannit, and, with his two brigadiers and officers commanding the light horse regiments, selected a prospective defensive outpost line running for three and a half miles south-south-east from Katib Gannit to a point one mile south-east of Hod el Enna. This line lay across the entrances through the sand-dunes to the Romani stronghold. No digging or other work was done to strengthen the ground, as the British leaders were strong in the hope that the enemy would come that way, and would in his attack commit his troops to the heavy sand. Chauvel aimed only at a holding and delaying action on the proposed line, and intended that the light horsemen, when pressed, should fall back slowly towards the camps, pivoting from the left on Katib Gannit. It was fully believed that the Turks, when they came, would advance by night; and it was anticipated that, if they blundered unexpectedly on to the Australian line, their plans would be disorganised, and that the light horsemen could offer sufficient resistance to dissipate their striking force and (aided by the deep sand) bring their movement to a standstill before it reached the camps and the railway. But while no defences were prepared, lest they might become known to the enemy and the plan spoiled, Chauvel's arrangements were made with great thoroughness. Telephone communication was laid out along the outpost line, and a second defensive position was selected, on which the light horsemen were to retire as they swung back from their pivot on the left.

If the scheme should prove successful, it was obvious that, as the Turkish force pressed in towards the camp after the light horsemen, its left flank must become increasingly disclosed; and this offered the way for an effective counter-stroke by Chaytor's Section Mounted Troops based upon Dueidar. Chauvel, in his reconnaissance of the ground, gave new names to its more prominent features. "Mount Meredith" was a large dune on the line between Katib Gannit

and Hod el Enna, while another raw, sandy knoll further west was marked as "Mount Royston." If the Turks conformed to the British anticipation, their left flank would inevitably offer itself to an effective blow about Mount Royston, which was only a few hours' march from Chaytor's camp; and it was hoped that the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Antill, which was to be released from the No. 2 Section further south, would arrive in time to join with the New Zealanders and the yeomanry in the projected counter-stroke. The scheme was almost fantastic in its optimism, so entirely did it depend on the Turkish commander's walking into the trap set for him. But, as will be seen, he met the British plans and wishes to a degree seldom equalled in warfare. Had the execution of the British scheme been nearly equal to the brilliance of its conception, the whole enemy force must have been destroyed.

The plan was perfection. Unhappily, no adequate steps were taken to ensure that it should be directed by the will of a single commander. Despite Murray's "suggestion" about moving forward, or, as an alternative, placing Chauvel or Smith in command of both the mounted troops and the infantry at Romani, Lawrence decided to conduct operations from Kantara, and left the two advanced commanders in independent control of their divisions. The telephone wire between Romani and Kantara ran above ground, and Lawrence recognised that it might easily be severed; but he had an alternative wire along the beach from Romani to Port Said, and thence to Kantara, and he was confident that communications would be maintained. At the close of the month he had no misgivings as to his capacity to control from Kantara a critical engagement upon the Romani ground.

Chauvel never departed from his determination not to establish isolated camps eastward of Romani. But steps were taken to deceive the enemy as to the British disposition in the oasis area, and to delay his advance until Lawrence was ready to meet him upon the best possible terms at Romani. To this end a dummy camp for a light horse brigade was laid out at Katia, tents erected, and sham trenches outlined to mislead the German airmen. After each day's reconnaissance the advanced light horse brigade retired on this camp at

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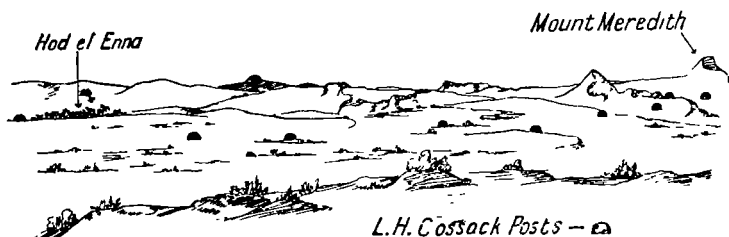
nightfall and, after a brief halt, covered the ground between Katia and Romani in the darkness, while the relieving brigade always reached the dummy camp before dawn.

At this stage the War Office, not satisfied with controlling the larger strategy of the campaign, began to play an active hand in the local tactics of the position. Murray had advised the Government that it was uncertain whether the Turks would remain on their advanced line or press on towards the Canal. The War Office, in reply, mentioned a British attack; but Murray, fully conscious of his disabilities, cabled that he "dared not take the offensive with his weak battalions if the enemy did not come in. The possible consequence of defeat was too serious for Egypt." He pointed out that the enemy was about 120 miles from the Turkish railhead, and would find it difficult to maintain himself in the desert. The War Office reply strongly suggested an attack, and urged that the enemy should not be allowed to make good in the oasis area. To Murray's plea that the water difficulty for his troops was a strong argument against an offensive, the War Office asked, with characteristic ignorance, why, if the water-supply from the brackish wells was good enough for the Turks, it was not good enough for the British. This question seemed intelligent enough, perhaps, in Whitehall, but it appeared somewhat foolish to those acquainted with the water-drinking habits of British Territorials and Turks respectively. The War Office also assured Murray that the continued success of the Russians in the Caucasus, and the Arab rising, made it unlikely that the enemy could bring any large force into Sinai.

Under this pressure Murray made preparations to attack. He decided to withdraw all possible troops from the central and southern sections of the Canal Defences, and, having promised Lawrence an increased supply of Egyptian labourers and camels to ensure his supply of water, he ordered him on July 24th to take the offensive at the earliest possible moment. At the same time Sir Archibald decided, subject to sanction from London, to make a raid from the sea on El Arish, proposing to throw ashore a strong party, destroy the enemy base, and withdraw when menaced.

In the opening days of August the extended enemy line showed increased activity and aggression, and everywhere

presented a stout front to the probing of the Australians. On August 2nd the 1st Light Horse Brigade, by a dashing thrust, supported by the horse artillery, drove the enemy out of Hod um Ugba, and kept him out of it all day. But almost everywhere else, from Oghratina to Mageibra, he denied the horsemen ground which had been open to the 2nd Brigade the day before. He was strongly posted about one and a half miles south of Katia, and it was clear that during the night he could advance into the hod there, which contains, in the Holy Family Well, the best water in northern Sinai. Officers' patrols posted on the night of the 2nd discerned enemy camelmén entering Katia half-an-hour before dawn. Infantry appeared in support of the Camels soon afterwards. There was also strong enemy movement to the south-east, to the high ground south of Hamisah. Before 8 o'clock Chaytor's force, operating on the British flank, reported about 2,000

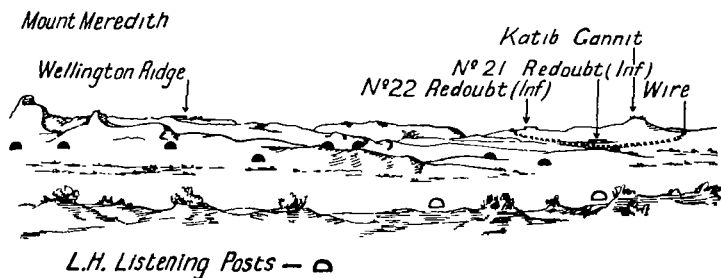


enemy holding high ground west of Bir Waset, with considerable movement towards Bir Nagid. It was now clear to the British leaders that the enemy did not intend to establish a defensive line and remain on it. His extensive digging and sandbagging had evidently been designed to ensure his forward position until he brought up his main forces and his guns, and also to cover his retreat in the event of defeat.

Chauvel anticipated that the enemy advance on Katia was preliminary to an attack on Romani. He therefore ordered the 1st Light Horse Brigade, under Meredith, to be prepared on the night of the 3rd to occupy the selected outpost line across the entrances to the sand-dunes between Katib Gannit and Hod el Enna. At nightfall on the 3rd the enemy's line ran from a point two miles east of Hill 110 in the north through Katia and south-west to Bir Nagid. The 2nd Light

Horse Brigade for the most part faced the enemy position, making contact with the Auckland Mounted Rifles of Chaytor's force on its right. But, following the usual plan, the brigade was withdrawn early in the night, and marched to its camp in the Romani area at Etmalier, which was reached at 10 o'clock. Meanwhile the 1st Light Horse Brigade, less the 1st Regiment, which was held in reserve at Romani camp, four miles away, took up the outpost line soon after dark.

Frequent reference was made in despatches during July to the "freshness" of the Anzac horses, and their consequent readiness for effective action if the Turks ventured to advance. But the excessive activity which followed the appearance of



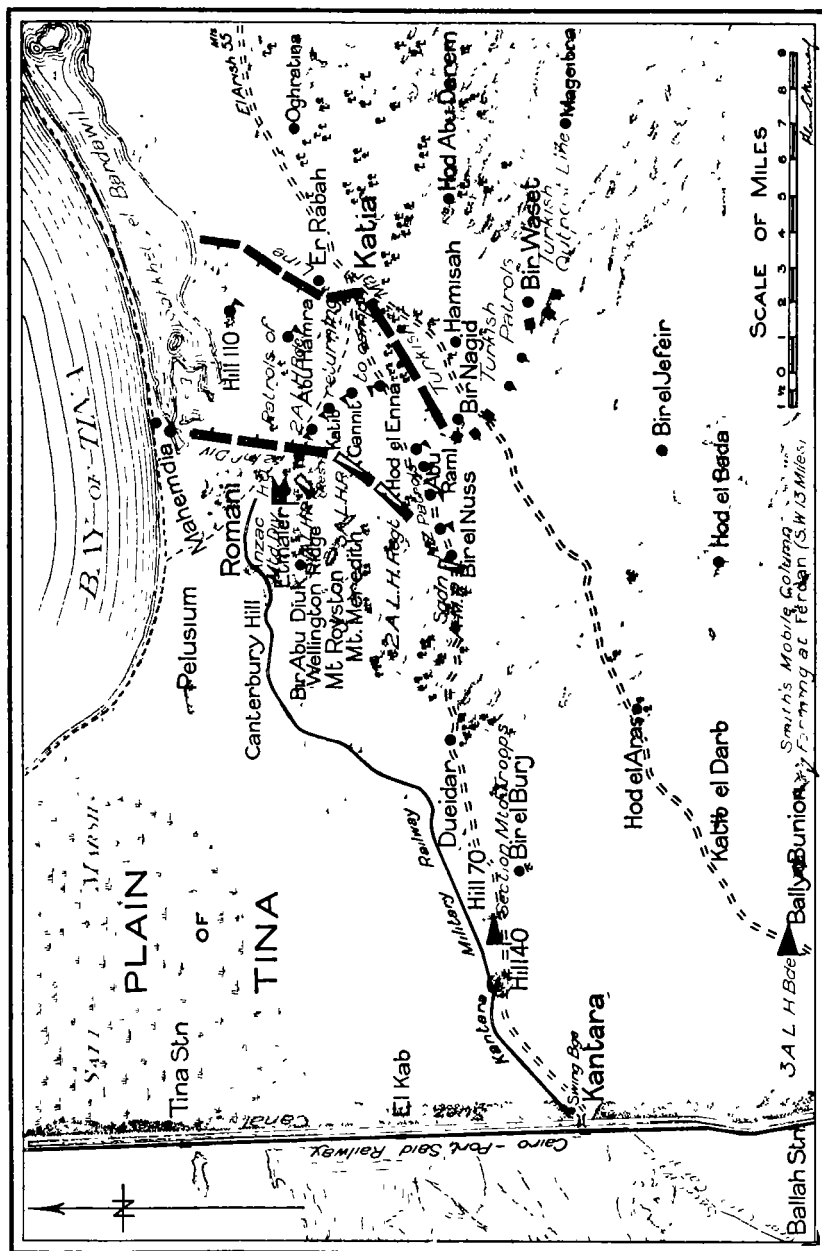
The line of posts held by the 1st A.L.H. Brigade on the night of 3rd August, 1916. The view is from the position of the enemy, looking north-west.

the enemy on July 20th had tried to the utmost the endurance of both men and horses, which even before that time had been reduced by the sustained work of the long summer. Murray had, as he said, relied entirely on the Anzac Mounted Division, and month after month they had of necessity been worked excessively. But the two light horse brigades at Romani on the night of August 3rd, though, like their horses, very jaded, were still formidable. The 1st Brigade had after its reconnaissance on the 2nd, which extended for more than twenty-four hours, reached camp at Romani after midnight. "We were dead-beat," one of the officers wrote afterwards, "and we stood to arms before dawn after no sleep, and began the work of the camp." Tired as the men were, they were eager for a close engagement against their old Gallipoli foe, and they believed absolutely in their capacity to overthrow him in open warfare. The 2nd and 3rd Regiments, therefore,

sat down on their long, thin line over the three and a half miles between Katib Gannit and Hod el Enna not only without misgivings, but keen in the hope that Chauvel's anticipations were sound, and that the enemy would that night come their way. A light horse regiment, complete with transport, numbers about 550 officers and men; but of every section of four men one is a horseholder when in action; moreover the regiments were not up to full strength. The two regiments, therefore, had only some 500 rifles in the line against the Turks. Including the 1st Light Horse Regiment in reserve, and the 2nd Brigade in camp at Etmaler, Chauvel had at Romani not more than 1,600 rifles for dismounted action.

For some time the light horse had been providing, in advance of the infantry line from Mahemdia to Katib Gannit, mounted listening posts which gave quiet nights and a sense of security to the battalions of the 52nd Division. These Lowlanders, if (as General Murray had complained to the War Office) still somewhat inexperienced, were, like most Scottish formations, excellent fighting material; and in the course of the subsequent campaign they developed into one of the finest divisions on the front. They had worked hard at the construction of their defences, but had had the assistance for some weeks of 3,500 Egyptian labourers; so that on the night of the 3rd the men were fit and in good spirits, and would have been quite capable, if called upon, of sustained offensive marching. They were an incomparably better division at that time than the 42nd. Cabling to the War Office on the eve of the Romani operations, and summing up the quality of his troops in the forward area, Murray expressed satisfaction with General Smith, and added, "infantry fair, cavalry good."

At midnight on August 3rd the British had about 10,000 rifles for the firing line and about fifty guns actually at Romani, with Chaytor's Section Mounted Troops only ten miles away at Hill 70, admirably placed to menace the enemy's left flank, and a line of yeomanry squadrons along the forward communications. Antill's brigade was marching up from the south. In support there was the 42nd Division (less two battalions already at Romani), which was then arriving at Kantara, twenty-three miles away. Moreover, the British



ROMANI—POSITION AT DUSK, 3RD AUGUST, 1916.

had railhead established in the heart of the Romani position, and an assured supply of ammunition, rations, and fresh water. Murray's advanced force was therefore scarcely inferior to the enemy in numbers; it was strong in mounted troops, it was placed in a particularly stout natural and prepared position, and it was supported by a complete division of infantry a few hours away by rail. The force lacked only one essential, but that one was of vital importance. It was without assured leadership. Murray was at Ismailia; Lawrence, to whom he had deputed the Katia section command, was at Kantara; and no co-ordination had been decided upon between Chauvel's two light horse brigades and Smith's infantry.

The total strength of the Turkish force was about 18,000, which gave it at most 12,000 or 14,000 rifles for the firing line. It was about 100 miles from railhead, indifferently fed, and wretchedly watered. Already it had trudged fifty miles over heavy sands at the height of summer; it had then been worked hard in preparing trenches, and had been harassed ceaselessly for many days by the aggressive light horsemen. Further, it was—with the exception of a few camelmén, who counted for very little even as mounted rifles—entirely an infantry force. Considering its distance from railway and the country it had traversed, it was remarkably strong in its artillery, which included a number of 5.9-inch guns and 4.2-inch howitzers. The transport of the heavy artillery across the desert was a good example of German resource and driving power, and of the submissive Turk's capacity for labour. Over many miles the wheels had been run along planks placed end to end and repeatedly picked up and carried forward. In other sandy areas two small trenches had been cut an axle-width apart and packed with the prickly bush of the desert, and the gun-wheels had been carefully directed over them; in other places the bushes had been cut and piled up to make a rough temporary roadway. In every direction there was the sharpest contrast between the facilities and prospects enjoyed by the two opposing forces. Under the circumstances it might have appeared impossible for the enemy to menace seriously the British position; but in all wars the Turk has upset military calculations and sprung surprises upon his foe. He was to excel himself at Romani.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF ROMANI

ALL Sinai nights are brilliant, and early on the night of August 3rd a low quarter-moon added to the light from the stars. The white sand, over which the outpost line of the 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Regiments extended, reflected the illumination of the heavens, and gave the peering troopers fair observation for short distances. The line of British infantry posts, commencing at Mahemdia on Lake Bardawil, ran due south to Katib Gannit, beyond which the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel D. Fulton, formed the left flank of the Australian position. Fulton's right covered the great feather-edged dune known as Mount Meredith, and the 2nd Regiment, under the temporary command of Lieutenant-Colonel G. H. Bourne,¹ extended south from that point towards Hod el Enna.

The outpost line of the mounted troops faced almost due east over the lower foot-hills of the Romani sand-dunes. Between the British stronghold and the Turks at Katia lay four or five miles of comparatively hard, undulating country covered with innumerable little hillocks and the short prickly bushes of the desert. While the ground presented no obstacle to a rapid night march, it afforded excellent cover for advancing troops and for riflemen creeping into position against the line of the light horsemen. The Australians stood across the inlets to those narrow gullies which sloped upwards through the sand-hills to the broad-topped elevation known as Wellington Ridge. From the summit of this ridge there was a long steady fall on the northern side towards the camps at Etmal, Romani, and railhead. Wellington Ridge, therefore, commanded the advanced British base, and the enemy, if he gained it, would be established behind the infantry posts from Mahemdia to Katib Gannit. Chauvel had suggested more than once that infantry posts should be established on this ridge; but the work had not been deemed necessary.

¹ Lieut.-Col. G. H. Bourne, D.S.O. Commanded 2nd L.H. Regt. 1916/18, and 1st L.H. Bde., temp., in 1918. Bank manager; of Brisbane and Toowoomba, Q'land; b Brisbane, 21 Nov., 1881.

As the 2nd Light Horse Brigade had returned towards Romani in the night from their last reconnaissance, they had observed a Turkish following movement. But a single shot, fired, probably by accident, in front of the outpost line near Hod el Enna at 10.30, was the first indication the Australians had of the close presence of the enemy. Soon afterwards two more shots were heard; then the stillness of the summer night was unbroken until just before midnight, when Australians near Hod el Enna reported that a party of thirty Turks had approached their position, and that they could see a larger force, estimated at 500, assembling a little further out. Communication by telephone had been established along the line and linked up with the camp at Romani, and at midnight the 1st Light Horse Regiment was called up from reserve and two squadrons were immediately put into the line on the left.

Subsequent information disclosed that the Turkish plan was to follow on the heels of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade on its return from reconnaissance, to march in the darkness up the gullies leading to Wellington Ridge, and to be in position there at dawn to charge down on the Etmaler and Romani camps. Having overwhelmed the camps, the enemy would have attempted to deal with the 52nd Division and the infantry posts before serious British reinforcements could arrive from Hill 70 and Kantara. But, discovering that the entrances to the gullies were held by the light horse, and uncertain as to the strength of the unexpected barrier, the enemy's advance-guard halted and waited for further orders and for the arrival of the main force. From midnight until nearly 1 o'clock the Turks maintained their silence. Then the night was suddenly disturbed by a wild babble of shouting and the customary Turkish battle-cry of "Allah! Allah!", with "Finish Australia! Finish Australia!" as a variation. This was followed by a heavy burst of fire along the whole line, which was immediately answered by the rifles of the light horsemen. Neither side yet had definite targets.

Firing was continued for more than an hour. Constantly creeping in, the Turks were at about 2 o'clock within thirty or forty yards of the light horse line. Still they could not be clearly seen, and the Australians, shooting with quiet delibera-

tion, were now aiming at the flashes of their rifles. Already there had been some exciting incidents. Mounted cossack posts had been thrown out in front of the Australian line, and the Turks crept or blundered into a number of these without being observed. Some of the men were bayoneted as they attempted to mount their horses. In front of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, two posts of eight men each, under Sergeants Bingham² and Tolman³ (both Tasmanians), were almost entirely destroyed, and the sergeants were killed fighting on their ground. Major M. Shanahan,⁴ of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment, riding round the listening posts, found four Australians who had lost their horses and had been outflanked by the enemy. Taking two of the men on to his horse, and with a trooper hanging to either stirrup, he dashed safely through the Turks in the darkness.

The strength and purpose of the Turkish attack were now unmistakable, and Meredith was quick to appreciate that his scattered, slender line must be pierced and broken. The posts ran over a number of sand-dunes "so steep that détours of up to half-a-mile" were necessary to move from post to post. Contact was precarious. Bourne therefore withdrew his right flank squadron under Major G. Birkbeck⁵ and sent it with two machine-guns to the support of his left. But this movement over the sand-hills in the darkness was difficult and slow, and meanwhile Shanahan on the left, and Fulton towards Katib Gannit, were heavily pressed. Shanahan was ordered to hang on at all costs, and his men, now exposed on their right flank, fought with fine tenacity. At about 1 a.m. the telephone wire between Bourne and Brigade Headquarters was broken; communication between squadrons was almost impossible, and from then until dawn the resistance depended upon the wits of squadron and troop leaders and the resource and resolution of the men. At about 2 o'clock Bourne threw in the last troops of his reserve squadron

² Sgt. O. E. H. Bingham, 3rd L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Central Castra, Tas; b. Spalford, near Ulverstone, Tas., 1 Sept., 1890. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916

³ Sgt. A. G. Tolman, 3rd L.H. Regt. Pastoralist; of Hobart and King Island, Tas.; b. Hobart, 18 July, 1878. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916

⁴ Maj M. Shanahan, D.S.O. 2nd L.H. Regt. Carpenter; b. Roma, Q'land, 30 March, 1870.

⁵ Col. G. Birkbeck, D.S.O., V.D. 2nd L.H. Regt. Civil servant; of Mackay, Q'land; b. Brisbane, Q'land, 15 March, 1876.

under Captain C. C. Stodart.⁶ The Turks, many of whom had discarded their boots to increase their speed over the loose sand, were then fiercely assailing Mount Meredith, and, although still held, were firing at point-blank range in overwhelming numbers upon the light horsemen. At the same time substantial enemy forces began to cross the front towards Hod el Enna; and it became clear that, obstructed on his first line of approach, he was aiming to outflank the Australian right and strike for the railway by way of Mount Royston. All ranks of the light horsemen were fully conscious that the safety of Romani and the whole British advanced force was in their hands. The old Gallipoli spirit was again aflame, and every man was resolved that the Turk, if he gained ground, must pay a heavy price for it. Romani was in its earlier and most critical stages almost entirely a soldier's battle.

At 2.30, after a brief lull in the attack, the enemy—who had now assembled his main flanking force, estimated at about 8,000 rifles—raised another great shouting and charged with the bayonet on Mount Meredith. The slender moon had set, and the darkness, except quite close to the sand, was intense; but the enemy was now massed and definitely located, and was giving the Australians a good target. Fulton's line had up to this time been standing firmly. Repeated attempts by the Turks to scale the almost perpendicular southern slope of Mount Meredith had been frustrated by a handful of men under Lieutenant G. P. Edwards,⁷ of the 1st Regiment, who, posted on the crest, shot the assailants in large numbers, and sent their bodies rolling down the wall of sand. Flanking attacks, however, were more successful, and at about 3 o'clock Mount Meredith was abandoned to the enemy. The defence of the position had fallen mainly on the 1st Regiment, and Granville's men suffered severely. During the morning Lieutenant W. McQuiggan⁸ was killed, and Captain F. V. Weir,⁹ Captain A. L. Fitzpatrick,¹⁰ Captain G. H. L.

⁶ Maj. C. C. Stodart, M.C. 2nd L.H. Regt. Station overseer; of Longreach, Q'land, b. Toowong, Q'land, 8 Feb., 1886.

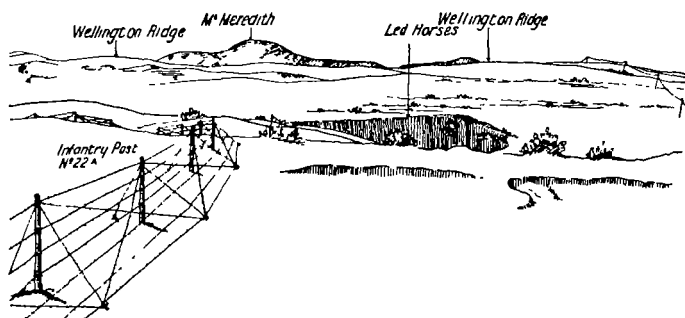
⁷ Lieut. G. P. Edwards, 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Gunnedah, N.S.W.; b. Camberwell, Melb., Vic., 4 Oct., 1889. Died of illness, 20 Nov., 1916.

⁸ Lieut. W. McQuiggan, 1st L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Rylstone, N.S.W.; b. Picton, N.S.W., 17 July, 1880. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916.

⁹ Maj. F. V. Weir, D.S.O. 1st L.H. Regt. Station manager; of Deniliquin and Hay, N.S.W.; b. Widgiewa Station, Urana, N.S.W., 14 Feb., 1878.

¹⁰ Capt. A. L. Fitzpatrick, 1st L.H. Regt. Clerk; of Windsor, N.S.W.; b. Goulburn, N.S.W., 2 July, 1887.

Harris,¹¹ and Lieutenant W. M. Nelson¹² were wounded. The loss of Mount Meredith left Shanahan's squadron on the right with both its flanks exposed, but as Birkbeck had not yet completed his movement from the direction of Hod el Enna and his location was uncertain, Bourne ordered Shanahan to stand his ground. Casualties became heavy, and Lieutenant A. S. Righetti,¹³ of the reserve squadron of the 2nd, was killed. Shanahan's squadron, assailed on three sides, was compelled to give ground, and by 3.30 had been forced back to the led horses.



View from southern end of infantry position at Romani looking south over Wellington Ridge. The 3rd A.L.H. Regiment, which was at first holding a line beyond this ridge, was gradually driven back on to the ridge, and, at a later stage, withdrew somewhat to the north-west (left) to Hod Diuk. In the shaded dip shelter was found for the horses of two regiments during the fight.

Bourne had already selected a reserve position on the ridge behind, and now gave the order to withdraw. The situation was critical. Already the Turks, with bayonets fixed, were closing on the Australians and the horses, and a few light horsemen, encumbered by their boots and leggings in the deep sand, were taken prisoner. So close was the fighting that a light horseman, endeavouring as he believed to lift a comrade up behind his saddle, discovered that the man was a

¹¹ Colonel G. H. L. Harris, M.C., V.D. 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Werमतong Station, Tumut, N.S.W., 28 Oct., 1881.

¹² Lieut. W. M. Nelson, 1st L.H. Regt. Seaman; b. Auckland, N.Z., 14 Feb., 1890.

¹³ Lieut. A. S. Righetti, 2nd L.H. Regt. Storekeeper; of Jondaryan, Q'land; b. Heywood, Vic., 23 Aug., 1889. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916.

Turk. But with perfect steadiness the Australians all along the line broke away mounted from the confident Turks, and retired bearing their wounded. "The bullets," wrote Bourne, "were making little spurts of flame all round us, owing to the phosphorus in the sand. Here we experienced for the first time the moral effects of turning our backs on the enemy, and the question arose in our minds as we rode, 'Can we re-form?' The order 'Sections about—Action front!' was given as we reached the position, and was splendidly carried out. This high test of discipline gave us renewed confidence."

Fulton's line conformed, pivoting on the infantry post at Katib Gannit, and the men, scooping out holes in the sand, settled down still full of fight and assured of reinforcements at dawn. Bourne on the right was reinforced by a squadron of Granville's 1st Regiment, and soon afterwards "to our great relief Birkbeck's party could be seen laboriously making its way through the heavy sand on our right." But the Turks speedily followed and resumed their pressure, while a machine-gun party on the captured heights of Mount Meredith swept the light horse line. Dawn disclosed the enemy in masses, and gave the Australians a rare target at close range; but it also revealed their own slender line in detail to the Turks, and they were smothered by a greatly superior weight of fire. At the same time the enemy appeared in large numbers on the right, outflanking the entire 1st Brigade, and began to enfilade both the light horse line and the led horses. The reserve position was therefore abandoned, and the riflemen, in perfect conformity, retreated slowly up the slope on to Wellington Ridge. Troop covered troop, maintaining a deadly fire with the utmost steadiness, and frustrated every effort of the Turks to use their overwhelming advantage in numbers by hand to hand fighting. Lieutenant P. S. R. Woodyatt¹⁴ was killed and Major Shanahan wounded about this time; but holes, speedily dug in the sandy firing lines, and the undulating surface of the ground, gave exceptional cover, and casualties were surprisingly light. Soon after daylight the Turks opened with their artillery, sweeping the line on Wellington Ridge with shrapnel, and the infantry posts and

¹⁴ Lieut. P. S. R. Woodyatt, 2nd L.H. Regt. Bank clerk; b Gympie, Q'land, 18 Nov., 1887. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916.

the camps with high explosive from the 5.9's. The shrapnel was at once effective, but the damage caused by the high explosive in the loose deep sand was purely local. The light horsemen were anxiously waiting for the sound of their own batteries, which, however, did not begin to fire until some time later. So confused had been the struggle in the darkness that neither side had ventured to use its artillery until after daylight. Sorely pressed, but fighting stubbornly, and, despite the loss of ground, still convinced of their capacity to hold the enemy, the men of the three regiments were cheered at about 4.30 by the sight of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade advancing to their support over the sand-hills from Etmal. Already by their calm and dogged work in the night Romani had virtually been won.

Immediately the Turks had been discovered in front of the outpost line, the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, which at about 11 p.m. on August 3rd had returned to Etmal, was turned out in readiness for action. At this time the brigade was under the temporary command of Brigadier-General J. R. Royston,¹⁶ in the absence of Ryrie, who was on brief leave in England. But Chauvel was in no hurry to commit his only reserve. He knew the quality of his old command in the 1st Brigade; hard pressed as the three regiments were, he deliberately left them unsupported throughout the night, so that he might have the 2nd Brigade intact to deal with the situation as it should be discovered at daylight. At dawn he personally led the brigade out at the canter from the palm hods at Etmal, and moved towards the firing line. Already it was plain to him that the main menace to Romani was no longer on the front of Meredith's brigade. The danger was further west, where the strong Turkish left flank, driving in between Etmal and Mount Royston, was marching for the railway behind the British position. He therefore ordered Royston to send the 6th and 7th Light Horse Regiments in on the right of the 1st Brigade to deny this flanking movement. The Wellingtons were not at once committed to the fight, but were thrown in soon afterwards. The Australians left their horses about a mile from the positions which they themselves were to occupy, and advanced on foot in one long line. They

¹⁶ Brig.-Gen J. R. Royston, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 3rd A.L.H. Bde., 1916/17. Company director, and farmer, of Port Shepstone, Natal, S. Africa, b. Durban, 29 April, 1860.

were heavily enfiladed as they pressed forward, but suffered very few casualties. Enemy machine-gun fire from the flank kicked up the sand immediately in front of the troops, and enemy shrapnel, bursting too high, pitched just over and fell behind them.

Able now to perceive the actual position, the Turks developed their attack with great rapidity and force. Increased machine-gun fire swept the light horse front. Artillery became very active, and at about 5 a.m. aeroplanes flew over and heavily bombed the British camps, railhead, and Anzac Mounted Division Headquarters. The Turks had lost six priceless hours; the heat was already becoming fierce; their troops, short of water and beginning to suffer acutely from thirst, were exhausted by forced marching and hours of futile fighting in the heavy sand; and they were still denied the position on Wellington Ridge which they had expected to gain in the coolness of the night without meeting resistance. Soon after dawn they made a weak demonstration from the east against some of the British infantry posts; but this activity was designed merely to pin down the 52nd Division, and was never developed.

The two light horse brigades now engaged in a desperate attempt to deny Wellington Ridge to the enemy. Soon after 6 a.m. the Leicester Battery opened fire from near Etmalier, and succeeded in driving the enemy machine-guns off their commanding position on Mount Meredith. Other British batteries came into action a little later, and their well-directed shrapnel thinned and harassed the advancing Turkish lines. But the enemy, with his greatly superior numbers and his strong flank movement to the west, steadily made headway.

Chauvel, however, recognised that, although the fight was extremely critical, the Turks were with wonderful precision conforming to his own and General Murray's hopes and anticipations. The sun and the heavy sand were now the Ottoman's most formidable enemies. Although his enveloping movement was succeeding, its progress was slow, and every minute his left flank was becoming more and more exposed to the contemplated attack of Chaytor's Section Mounted Troops from Hill 70. Provided the two light horse brigades could save the camps and railhead, it was imperative that they should

not risk a hand to hand encounter, which against such odds might end in their destruction and give victory to the enemy. Accordingly Chauvel, riding about the position with that complete calm which always distinguished him in action, and giving confidence and steadiness to his staff and men, fought his gradual withdrawal without grave concern. Provided the light horse resistance was maintained, each hundred yards the Turks advanced brought them nearer to defeat. It was inevitable that, unless they very speedily won the hods and the water at Etmalier and Romani, the great assaulting wave must spend itself and perish on the burning sand.

Chauvel had shown his faith in the light horse when he left the 1st Brigade unsupported through the long hours of darkness. In that precarious retirement not a single Australian troop had been thrown into confusion. Hour after hour, fighting bitterly all the way and sometimes engaged in hand to hand struggles, the crooked, patchy line had held together, elastic but unbreakable. Not an acre of ground gained by the enemy had been gained quickly or cheaply. Almost every minute and yard of the way the Turks, with all their superior numbers, had been compelled to use each scrap of cover and to creep forward foot by foot. If daylight had subjected the Australians to heavy punishment, it had also made contact easy. The fight was still a troop-leader's and a soldier's fight, but the position was now beginning to give full scope to the staff work of division and brigade. Soon after daylight a considerable enemy body, which had crept up behind Mount Meredith, rushed over the lower slopes of the hill and reached cover in a valley at the foot of Wellington Ridge, within 300 or 400 yards of the light horse line. As the morning wore on, the Australians were heavily punished, and among those to fall were Major E. Windeyer¹⁶ and Lieutenant P. V. M. Ryan,¹⁷ of the 7th Regiment, both severely wounded. Harassed by heavy shrapnel fire, as well as by rifles and machine-guns at close range, they continued to give ground, and at about 7 a.m. the Turks gained possession of Wellington Ridge. The 1st Brigade (less the 3rd Regiment, which

¹⁶ Maj. E. Windeyer, 7th L.H. Regt. Auctioneer and commission agent; of Raymond Terrace, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 14 Aug., 1876.

¹⁷ Lieut P V M Ryan, 7th L.H. Regt. Journalist; b Dublin, Ireland. 27 Sept., 1881

remained in the line) was then withdrawn to a position slightly to the north of Etmaler camp, and resistance to further Turkish progress fell for some time upon the 3rd, 6th, and 7th Light Horse Regiments and the Wellingtons, all of which were now slowly falling back by alternate squadrons. The retirement was distinguished by many acts of individual gallantry. Despite the immediate presence of the enemy, all wounded were carried back over the heavy sand. Corporal Curran,¹⁸ of the 7th, after bearing in a number of men, was killed while still engaged in this noble work.

In possession of Wellington Ridge, the Turks were within 700 yards of the Etmaler camp; if they could have pressed forward immediately, the crisis of the fight would have been reached. Riding along the firing line at this time Royston met Lieutenant-Colonel W. Meldrum,¹⁹ a dour fighter of Scotch descent, who was in command of the Wellingtons. "You can give them no more ground," said Royston, "or we shall lose the camps." "If they get through my line here," replied the New Zealander grimly, "they can have the damned camps." The Turks were six hours late in reaching Wellington Ridge, and that six hours had exhausted the troops and confused the tactics of their leaders. The enemy's communications were by this time disorganised, and possibly some time elapsed before he appreciated that his outflanking movement between Etmaler and Mount Royston was proving so successful in withdrawing the Australians from his immediate front on Wellington Ridge. But probably it was sheer exhaustion which caused him to halt his advance when he gained the ridge, and so gave Chauvel invaluable breathing-space for nearly an hour. When the enemy won the ridge, he stopped short of the crest; it was nearly 8 o'clock before his riflemen appeared on the sky-line and began to pour a heavy fire into the camp at Etmaler. Fortunately these troops made a very definite artillery target, and the Ayrshire and Leicester Batteries were immediately laid on to them. Quickly finding the range, the British gunners swept the Turkish line and

¹⁸ Cpl. F. P. Curran, D.C.M. 7th L.H. Regt. Carter, b. Tenterfield, N.S.W., 1887. Killed in action, 4 Aug., 1916.

¹⁹ Brig.-Gen. W. Meldrum, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded N.Z.M.R. Bde. 1917/19. Solicitor; of Hunterville and New Plymouth, N.Z.; b. Kamo, North Auckland, N.Z., 28 July, 1865.

cleared the crest, and the enemy did not again show over the top until late in the afternoon. Having gained his intended point of deployment on the ridge, he was too enfeebled to exploit his advantage. After their eight hours' ordeal, the light horsemen had triumphed, and the position was safe.

With the Turks held on Wellington Ridge, and with their left flank open towards Mount Royston, the time was now ripe for Chaytor's counter-stroke. But Chaytor was under Lawrence's direct control, and Lawrence was no longer in touch with the Romani situation. Early in the morning the direct telephone-wire from the battleground to Kantara had been cut, presumably by an enemy agent, and the alternative line by way of Port Said was found to be so slow that it was practically worthless. Only after a long delay was Chauvel able to join up with Lawrence, advise him of the position, and ask that Chaytor should be ordered to advance on Mount Royston, and Antill with the 3rd Brigade on Bir el Nuss. But by that time Chaytor was on the march from Hill 70 to Dueidar, and his direction was twice changed before he was finally directed on Mount Royston. And, despite all the warning the Turks had given, Antill, who was moving to orders and who was in no way to blame, did not approach the Romani district until the day's fight had ceased. Unfortunately Murray's fears were proved to have been well founded: Lawrence might almost as well have been in Cairo as at Kantara.

Soon after 7 o'clock a brigade of enemy infantry and some mounted troops advanced strongly between Mount Royston and Etmaler, and General Royston reported half-an-hour later that the enemy was enveloping his right. At the same time the first practical assistance was received from the troops to the west, when a squadron of Gloucesters of the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, which was holding a precautionary position covering the railway, engaged the extreme flank of the enemy. But the menace there was still serious and Chauvel was again obliged to extend his line to meet it. As the Australians fell back from Wellington Ridge, a battalion commander of the 52nd Division had on his own initiative taken over the extreme left of the Anzac line. A little later Chauvel asked for further support from the infantry

there, and about two companies were put into the fight at the critical stage when he was obliged to extend his line towards Mount Royston. Between 10 and 11 o'clock the Wellington Mounted Rifles were on the left flank of the Anzac line, which extended from the right flank of the infantry north of Wellington Ridge to the sand-hills north of Mount Royston. Next to the Wellingtons were the 7th Light Horse, then the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th in that order. The 1st Light Horse Regiment was in reserve. The position now became stationary along the whole front, except for a slight and fruitless attempt by the Australian right to occupy Mount Royston. It was plain that, unless the enemy possessed strong reserves and pushed at once with great vigour, his whole enterprise must fail. He continued to bombard the infantry posts, which presented a very clear target to his gunners, and also played shrapnel and machine-gun fire freely on to the light horse line and rear.

Up to this time the brigades of the 52nd Division had taken no part in the engagement, except to suffer bombardment in their posts. General Smith was obeying orders and holding his north-and-south barrier. At about 10 o'clock, after the advance across Wellington Ridge had been soundly checked, and there was still no news of Chaytor's Section Mounted Troops, Chauvel came to the conclusion that the main strength of the Turkish attack was exhausted; and, impatient perhaps at seeing his men still fighting an infantry battle, when a rare opportunity was developing for the use of his horses, proposed that the 156th Brigade should take over the line from the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades. The 156th was at that time in reserve about two miles behind Etmal, fresh, and far stronger in rifles than the two hard-fought light horse brigades. Chauvel's proposal was sent direct by a staff officer; the brigadier was asked to relieve the Australians, so that their horses might be watered, after which the mounted force would swing round the left flank of the enemy to co-operate with the New Zealanders and 5th Yeomanry Brigade in a general enveloping attack.

Obviously such a movement at that time must have had excellent prospects of completely destroying the whole Turkish force. But Chauvel's proposal only served to emphasise the wretched position brought about by the existence of two

independent divisional commands and Lawrence's distant position. The leader of the brigade replied that he must take his orders from General Smith, who intended, when the proper moment arrived, to make a counter-attack eastwards from the infantry posts towards Abu Hamra, and that his was the reserve brigade for that movement. Chauvel, having no alternative, accepted the reply, and continued to use his men as infantry while the golden opportunity for cavalry fighting slipped away as the day advanced.

Soon after 11 o'clock the New Zealand Brigade (less the 5th Light Horse Regiment) established communications with the 5th Yeomanry Brigade, and it was clear that Chaytor, despite the delay caused by the break in the telephone wire, would arrive in time for an effective counter-stroke. Arrangements were made for an attack upon Mount Royston, which was now held by the enemy in considerable strength. Two guns of the Ayrshire Battery opened fire on the Turks in the hods on the left of the position, and the 42nd Division, which was asked to support the attack, immediately pushed forward its advanced brigade from Pelusium.

Early in the morning, when Lawrence was convinced that the main attack would be directed to the outflanking and destruction of the Romani stronghold, he had urged the 42nd Division forward to Pelusium. The 5th Light Horse Regiment under Wilson, who had orders to discover the enemy's left flank, had left Dueidar shortly after midnight and marched by Bir el Nuss towards Nagid. That place was reported clear by the advance-guard just before daylight; but soon afterwards two battalions of enemy, in all about 1,500 strong, were observed from a high ridge to the south marching northwards towards Hod el Enna. Seeing the light horsemen, this force took up a line on another high ridge, and opened fire on the Australians at an effective range with machine-guns and mountain guns. Wilson, satisfied that he had accomplished his object and definitely located the left flank of the enemy, retired on Bir el Nuss, where he received orders from the New Zealand Brigade to proceed to a point three miles along the road towards Dueidar and there await instructions. Unfortunately the regiment then lost touch with the brigade, and so was not available for the advance on Mount Royston later

in the day. But the morning encounter with the enemy column at Nagid proved highly serviceable, as it satisfied Lawrence that no immediate blow was intended further to the west, besides delaying an important enemy reinforcement for two hours at a critical stage of the struggle. At nightfall Wilson, still without orders, decided to proceed to Dueidar; here he found the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Antill, which had moved up during the day from Bally Bunion.

Although the report from the 5th Light Horse Regiment satisfied Lawrence as to the immediate safety of the Canal, his caution in holding back the 42nd Division so long had made it impossible for this urgently needed reserve to reach Romani on the 4th. While one infantry division (the 52nd) sat still in its posts right away from the Turkish attack, the other (the 42nd) was, considered as a mobile reserve, too distant to come into action.

In his endeavour to check the enemy's strong and sustained flanking movement to the west, Chauvel sent a squadron of the 6th Light Horse Regiment under Major D. G. Cross²⁰ to his extreme right flank; later the balance of the regiment under Lieutenant-Colonel C. D. Fuller²¹ followed in support. As the regiment advanced to its position near Bir Abu Diuk, the troops were heavily shelled and also bombed from the air. Fuller soon had two squadrons in action with machine-guns against a body of about 2,000 Turks, who were moving past and round his front at a range of only 800 yards. Heavy casualties were inflicted, but the enemy could not be arrested, and after a lively fire-fight the men of the 6th, who hung on until he was almost within bayonet reach, retired for about 700 yards. The 3rd Regiment was then sent round to the right of the 6th, and Fuller also had the assistance of a few infantry details who, having been in the neighbourhood overnight, had during the morning been put into small redoubts. But the Turks continued to envelop the right of the line, and the 6th Regiment was again pulled out and taken round beyond the 3rd. The enemy was now about 1,000 yards

²⁰ Maj. D. G. Cross, D.S.O. 6th L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Cootamundra, N.S.W., 10 June, 1892.

²¹ Lieut.-Col. C. D. Fuller, D.S.O. Commanded 6th L.H. Regt. 1916/17, and 2nd L.H. Bde. temp., in 1917 and 1918. Farmer, b. Dunmore. Kiama, N.S.W., 10 Feb., 1882.

distant; he occupied low ground under the sand-hills at Mount Royston, on top of which he had established an observation post. Favoured by superior elevation, the Australians, although very extended and weak, harried the enemy whenever he showed a disposition to advance. Perhaps the Turks also overestimated the light horse numbers, for they halted and began to dig in.

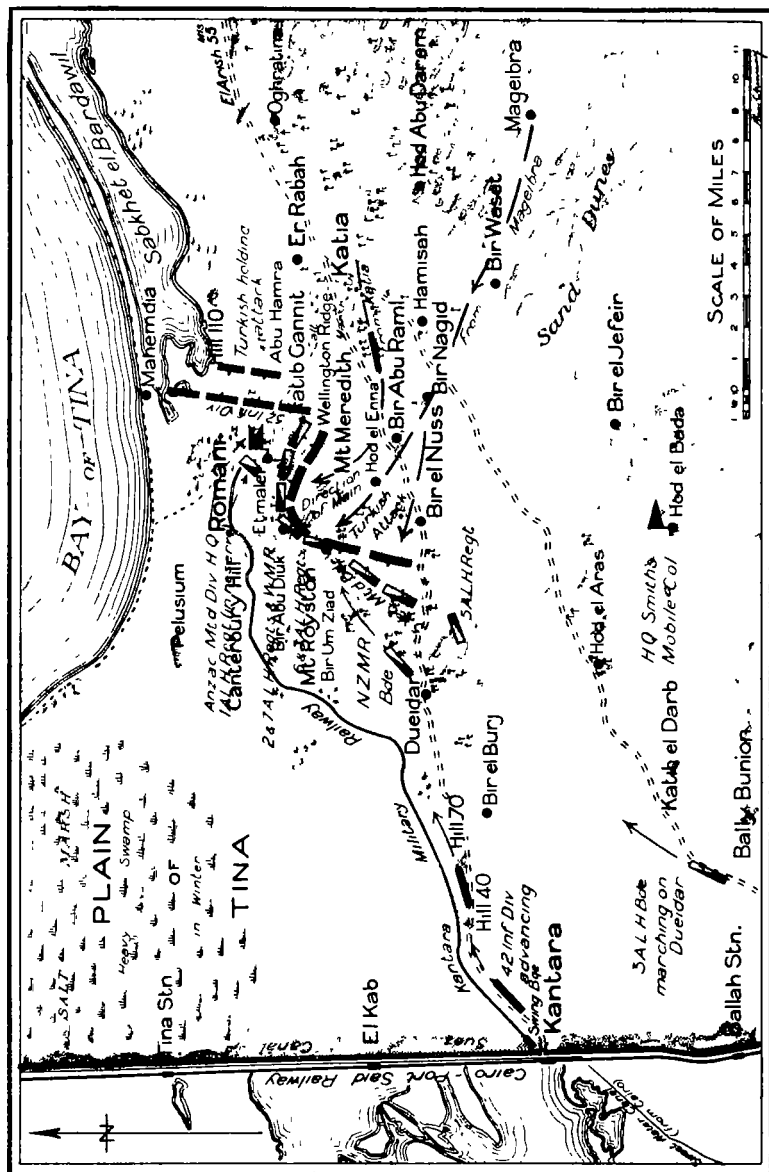
The Gloucesters were now strongly placed on a knob to the west of Mount Royston, to the right front of the light horse, and they reported the enemy in strength on their front but making no effort to pass them on either side. Major J. H. Whyte,²² a New Zealand officer who was acting as brigade-major of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, then got into touch by heliograph with a body of troops just becoming visible, and asked "Who are you?" The welcome response was "Chaytor." Whyte signalled "We are 2nd Brigade and Gloucesters," and then, having given the positions of the British and the Turks, asked: "Will you attack Mount Royston?" The reply came: "Advancing to attack Mount Royston."

All these movements to the right naturally left Chauvel's line very weak in front of the enemy on Wellington Ridge. The 7th Regiment was now so close to Etmalier camp that during the afternoon the cooks, under heavy fire, served the men with tea as they lay in their little holes in the sand along the firing line. But the Turks, although they reinforced their troops behind the crest, showed no disposition to advance. At about 11.30 a.m. a mountain battery had shelled Etmalier, but, the dust raised by its action having been observed, it was promptly silenced by the Ayrshire Battery. A further demonstration was made against the line of infantry posts from the east, and a little later two considerable bodies entered Abu Hamra.

But the advance of the New Zealanders now made Mount Royston the vital point of the battle, as it was clear that, if Chaytor could smash the extended Turkish flank, the whole enemy force would be in extreme danger. Chauvel's horse

²² Col. J. H. Whyte, D.S.O., M.C., Wellington Mtd. Rifles. Officer of N.Z. Staff Corps; of Palmerston North, N.Z.; b. Wairoa, South Auckland, N.Z., 17 Dec., 1876.

Map No. 5



ROMANI—POSITION AT 4 P.M., 4TH AUGUST, 1916. (CERTAIN ADVANCED UNITS OF THE 42ND DIVISION WERE ALSO NEAR PELUSIUM AND ROMANI.)

artillery, together with two 18-pounder batteries of the 52nd Division, were therefore directed to fire on the hods and depressions round Mount Royston, and had a material effect in checking any further enemy advance before the arrival of the New Zealanders. Chaytor's force, as it approached Mount Royston, was reduced to the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, six troops of the Aucklands, and a few squadrons of yeomanry; but he hoped that the 127th Infantry Brigade of the 42nd Division, which was on the march across the heavy sand from Pelusium, would come up in time to support his blow at the enemy's flank. As he advanced he was met by Royston, of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, who had all day been galloping over the battleground.

As Chauvel was the brain of Romani, so this South African veteran soldier was the fighting spirit. In the course of a number of campaigns against Boers and natives Royston had become famous as a picturesque natural leader of men. He first came among the Australians as commanding officer of the 12th Light Horse Regiment; and any resentment the troops might have felt at not being led by an Australian was forgotten in the immediate recognition of his remarkable qualities as a fighting leader and his personal loveliness. Royston was then nearly sixty years old, and massively built; but despite his years and his weight he appeared as insensible to fatigue as he was utterly careless of danger. From the moment his force entered the fight at Romani he had fearlessly ridden up and down the exposed firing line. Parties of men crouching low in the sand were cheered again and again to see "Galloping Jack," as they called him, come racing up to them with yards of blood-stained bandage from a flesh wound trailing after him. "Keep moving gentlemen, keep moving," was his constant advice to his officers. And to the men, "Keep your heads down, lads. Stick to it, stick to it! You are making history to-day." To a hard-pressed troop on the naked flank he cried: "We are winning now. They are retreating in hundreds." "And," said one of the light horsemen afterwards, "I poked my head over the top, and there were the blighters coming on in thousands." During a fight Royston was careless of sectors and units. He was that day as active among the regiments of the 1st Brigade as among

his own men. Within a few hours he galloped fourteen horses to a standstill. On his own initiative he dashed over to meet Chaytor, and in a few sentences gave the New Zealander a grasp of the situation.

Chaytor's task was now clear. The Turks on the flank, to the number of about 2,000, were halted on and around Mount Royston. They were held in front by the 6th and 3rd Light Horse Regiments, and were being vexed by the fire of the British gunners. The Somerset Battery, which was with Chaytor, joined in the bombardment, and early in the afternoon the New Zealanders and yeomanry, with the British infantry coming up in support, advanced dismounted on Mount Royston. As they trudged forward in the intense heat over the heavy sand of the complicated little ridges, they seldom found definite targets for their rifles; and for some hours the Turks, fighting stubbornly and shooting well, as they always did on the defensive, maintained their position. But all the afternoon the New Zealanders and the yeomanry steadily gained ground; at 6 o'clock the enemy, refusing as usual conflict with the bayonet, hoisted the white flag and surrendered in large numbers. Half-an-hour later about 500 prisoners and the mountain battery, which had been put out of action earlier in the day by the Ayrshire gunners, were captured.

Shortly before the collapse about Mount Royston, the enemy made his final effort to advance over Wellington Ridge, but, as his men showed on the crest, they were raked with shrapnel and dispersed. Chauvel had arranged for the 156th Infantry Brigade to advance on Wellington Ridge during the flank attack of the New Zealanders and yeomanry, and had given orders for the whole line of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades to advance immediately Mount Royston was captured. The infantry assault, however, did not develop; and, although the light horse line everywhere commenced to move as soon as success on Mount Royston was assured, darkness was now falling, and the position was considered too involved, and the Australians and Wellingtons too exhausted, for a night operation. Chauvel therefore decided to check the assault, and to rest on his line until daylight. But before the order was given the 3rd and 6th Light Horse Regi-

ments on the right had advanced briskly and taken many prisoners. At nightfall the British line ran between Wellington Ridge and Etmalier to near Mount Royston.

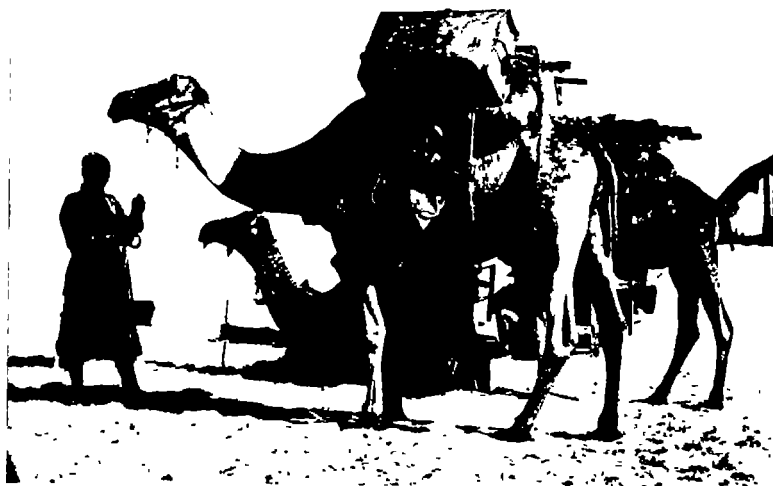
Despite the break in communications, both Lawrence and Murray had been kept informed of the main developments of the fight. The Commander-in-Chief was quick to see the opportunity which the stand of the light horse opened to the British. One of his staff officers, telegraphing to Lawrence during the morning of the 4th, said: "The Chief is glad the enemy has committed his troops in heavy sand, and thinks you should strain every nerve to push out Douglas's infantry (42nd Division) and Chaytor's and Antill's cavalry, both striking the flank of his enveloping attack, and more especially to work round his left rear and thus prevent the possibility of the escape of this wing of the hostile force."

To this message Lawrence replied: "I am sending up Douglas's infantry as rapidly as traffic arrangements permit, but I do not expect to have more than two brigades available to operate from about Pelusium to-morrow morning, the 5th. Chauvel's cavalry have been hard pressed and fighting continuously since early last night, and since his line has been pressed back I have been compelled to send Chaytor's brigade to prolong and strengthen his right to the south of Canterbury Hill. Antill has been brought across to Hill 70 and will, if the situation permits, be able, I hope, to operate by Duiedar against the enemy's left, which appears to be entrenched about Hod el Enna. The heavy ground and the tiredness of the horses and difficulty about water supply will, I am afraid, make a bold encircling movement difficult. But as soon as the troops are in position and the situation has been cleared up more, I intend to push forward wherever possible. The enemy has been attacking the defensive line from the east strongly, and the works there have been heavily shelled. But neither these nor the attacks from the west have been pushed really home up to the present." Lawrence's opinion as to the attacks on the 52nd Division was distinctly at fault; and it is apparent that he was not so satisfied with the situation as Murray, and did not look upon it as one which offered an immediate opportunity for the boldest possible offensive.

As darkness fell on the day of the battle, the condition of

the Turks gave them little prospect of a successful renewal of their enterprise on the morrow. Most of the prisoners taken had been without water for some hours—many of them all day—and the food in their haversacks consisted chiefly of green dates which they had gathered in the hods. After a heavy day's preparation with much skirmishing on the 3rd, they had marched and fought all night, and had been continuously moving and engaged throughout a day which was exceptionally hot even for that season on the desert. Everywhere they had been checked and severely mauled, while at Mount Royston they had been almost entirely destroyed. Many of them were suffering acutely from dysentery. Worst of all, their leaders were well informed as to the existence of substantial British reinforcements nearer the Canal, and all officers and men must have been depressed by a sense of failure and complete despair of any improvement in their position.

On the British side the position was entirely different. The troops of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades were, it is true, very much exhausted. For twenty hours the men of the 1st had been heavily and almost ceaselessly engaged, and those of the 2nd for nearly as long a time. The 2nd Brigade had already been two nights without sleep. On an allowance of one quart of water to each man, they had been lying out all day under a fierce sun, with many hurried advances and fighting retirements in loose sand, over which walking was exceedingly laborious, even without rifle and ammunition equipment. Their casualties, if not destructive, had been heavy. But at nightfall they were still incomparably better placed than the Turks. Fighting as they were, right on their camps, many of them that night enjoyed their customary hot tea and full rations; and, weary as they were, they were sustained by that abnormal strength felt by troops conscious of victory. They had held their line, stopped the enemy, and saved the position. The dramatic intervention of the New Zealanders and yeomanry had sent a thrill through their ranks, and officers and men, vigilant in their line, awaited the dawn in full confidence that the defensive stage of the struggle was over, and that with the daylight they would sweep the Turks before them.



CAMELS BEARING WATER ON THE DESERT

*Taken by Lieut Col L C Wilson 5th L H Regt
Aust War Museum Collection No B2415*



MACHINE-GUNNERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B460

To face p 160



BRIGADIER-GENERAL J. R. ROYSTON (RIGHT), COMMANDER OF THE 3RD AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE 1916-17, AND LIEUTENANT-COLONEL L. C. MAYGAR V.C. (LEFT), 8TH LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT, WITH AN ENEMY GUN CAPTURED AT EL ARISH

*Taken by Lieut-Col H. H. Scott 6th LH Regt
4ust War Museum Collection No B2815*

The New Zealanders, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade were in even better condition for a renewal of the struggle. Thus the British had five brigades of cavalry ready for action against a beaten and disorganised force. But the main British superiority over the enemy on the night of Romani lay in its infantry. The 52nd Division on its line of posts had suffered very few casualties from gun-fire, and the men, not having been in action, were comparatively fresh. Moreover, they were admirably placed for movement against the Turks; for these, based on Katia, now had their main force extended far past the right flank of the British division, while the 52nd Division, 7,000 effective rifles strong, was only between four and five miles from Katia—nearer to it than the bulk of the beaten army. The 42nd Division had crossed the Canal, and was based on Pelusium. Its 126th Brigade was forward, near Mount Royston, but had not arrived in time to play a serious part in that engagement, and had suffered only slight losses.

There was little rest that night for the light horsemen. After fighting until dark, the Australians were called upon for particular watchfulness along their slender line; and the watering of horses, the issue of ammunition and water and rations to the men, and the preparation for the bayonet advance which was decided upon for dawn, kept the tired troops constantly engaged. But they had now been long enough engaged in warfare to have acquired the capacity to sleep whenever a few minutes offered, regardless of the discomfort or the excitement of the moment. Troops fighting hotly at one moment would at the next, if orders permitted, be heavily and peacefully sleeping, and that night, if very few of the officers closed their eyes, most of the men snatched brief reviving spells of unconsciousness.

The two brigade ambulances worked throughout the night to relieve the wounded and prepare all mobile cases for transport by rail to Kantara. The hospital tents were overcrowded; the wounded lay out in the open under the surrounding palms, where twinkling lights showed the movements of medical officers and orderlies dressing their wounds and giving them refreshment. The surgeons engaged in the operating tents, which were placed deep in the hods, did their

work to the accompaniment of bursting shells, the splash of shrapnel pellets on the palm leaves, and the whine of the 5.9's passing over towards railhead. But the occasional shells that fell among the ambulances were probably the result of accident. Here, as at Gallipoli and, with occasional doubtful exceptions, during the whole Palestine campaign, the Turks scrupulously respected the Red Cross. Only a few days before Romani was fought a German airman had dropped a message—which chanced to fall at the door of Chauvel's tent—asking the Australians to mark their ambulances more clearly, so that they should not be bombed. This chivalrous advice was acted upon, and subsequent bombers were careful to avoid them.

Notwithstanding all the notice given by the enemy of his attack, the arrangements for the transport of the wounded from railhead to Kantara were deplorable, and should have led to drastic action against the officers responsible. The Mesopotamia scandals were repeated on a small scale. No hospital trains were provided. One lot of wounded reached railhead at 10 o'clock in the morning, when there was an empty train in the siding; but, despite the protests of the medical officer in charge, this was used for the transport of Turkish prisoners, and the light horsemen were allowed to lie about for hours under shell-fire in the blistering sun. They were then taken to Kantara in open trucks, the journey of twenty-three miles occupying from six to fifteen hours, during which the men were without lights or attendance. A number of officers and men who had left the ambulances in a sound condition died from sheer neglect and exhaustion. Some of them remained for two days in hospital at Kantara, almost entirely without attention or food. Responsibility for this callous incompetence lay with No. 3 Section of the Canal Defences and General Headquarters, as Australian control ceased when the men were delivered at railhead. Strong protests led to an inquiry, which confirmed the charges: afterwards there was some improvement.

The supply of water for the horses always controlled the movement of the mounted brigades. At 7 o'clock on the evening of the 4th, immediately after clearing up the prisoners at Mount Royston, the New Zealanders and the 5th (Mounted) Yeomanry Brigade were on the march back to the wells at

Pelusium, their position on the flank having been taken over by the 127th Brigade of the 42nd Division. Soon after dark water was also given to as many horses of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades as could be spared.

CHAPTER XII

KATIA AND BIR EL ABD

EARLY in the morning of August 5th Sir Archibald Murray in a message to Lawrence said: "I think the enemy must be tired, hungry, thirsty, and shaken, and believe that vigorous and even exhausting action on the part of your troops to-day will simplify and ease your future work." Some hours earlier, however, Lawrence had issued orders to his three divisions for the resumption of the battle at dawn; and at 6 a.m., in a further communication to Chauvel and Smith, he added: "The advance is to be strongly pressed. The Anzac Mounted Division will carry the pursuit as far as its resources will permit. As soon as the front is clear the infantry will push forward as far as possible before the heat of the day, and resume its marching in the evening." The general line of the advance for the 52nd Division was to be eastwards on Abu Hamra, and for the 42nd Division by Hod el Enna direct on Katia.

But two hours before this message was received, immediately on the first sign of dawn, Chauvel had moved vigorously with his horsemen. Lawrence's general scheme was to drive the enemy from his position on Wellington Ridge to the line Katib Gannit-Hod el Enna. The infantry was then to make a strong advance against the Turks' northern flank in the direction of Abu Hamra and Er Rabah; and, while the infantry pressed his right, the cavalry, swinging out to the south, was to envelop and crush his left. Had the 52nd Division moved as soon as the light horse cleared Wellington Ridge, this combined movement must have resulted in the capture of most of the enemy forces still west of Katia. But, as on the previous day, there was no sound co-operation between the two divisions. The infantry did not clear the defensive posts until after 9 a.m., and had made practically no advance by 2 p.m. This delay was fatal to the whole project.

At 4 a.m. the men of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, with the infantry on the extreme left co-operating, leaped from

their long irregular line between the infantry posts and Mount Royston, and advanced with the bayonet. Gaunt from prolonged sleeplessness, their eyes bloodshot from glare and strain, their faces begrimed with dust and sweat, and bristly with a few days' growth of beard, the Australians and the Wellingtons might have unnerved troops in better condition than the unfortunate Turks opposed to them. On the right the 1st Light Horse Brigade and the 6th Light Horse Regiment encountered very little resistance from the enemy, who, after firing a few shots, everywhere surrendered; but further to the left, where the 7th Light Horse Regiment and the Wellingtons advanced on Wellington Ridge, the Turks for a time fought stubbornly. Soon after dark on the previous evening the infantry had reported the capture of Wellington Ridge, but their slight success had been confined to the south-eastern end of the position, and at daylight the enemy were strong in front of the Australians and New Zealanders.

Marching in a long single line, the 7th Light Horse and the Wellingtons at once came under fire. A party of Turks in a hod 200 yards in front of the 7th were rushed with the bayonet and overwhelmed. Lieutenant-Colonel G. M. M. Onslow,¹ a gallant and impetuous leader, then advanced from the hod with three men about twenty yards in advance of his swinging troopers, and all four were immediately shot down by Turks concealed only a few yards in front of them. Onslow was severely wounded, and had at once to be carried to the rear. But the line showed no sign of wavering. Major H. B. Suttor² took over command, and the advance quickly topped Wellington Ridge and swept down on the main body of the Turks assembled between the ridge and Mount Meredith. The Turks, thrown into confusion, shot without precision and, as the Australians and New Zealanders rushed shouting down upon them, surrendered in large bodies; by 5 a.m. upwards of 1,000 prisoners had been captured. These were immediately marched back to Etmalier, where they streamed past Onslow as he lay outside one of the ambulance tents, and he found the sight of them "very gratifying."

¹ Brig-Gen. G. M. Macarthur Onslow, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 5th L.H. Bde., 1918/19 Estate manager and grazier; of Murrandah, Camden, N.S.W.; b. Camden Park, Menangle, N.S.W., 2 May, 1875. Died, 12 Sept., 1931.

² Maj. H. B. Suttor, 7th L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Waikato, N.Z., 23 July, 1880

Along the front from Katib Gannit to Hod el Enna the Turks were now surrendering without resistance, and across the broken ground towards Katia they could be seen retreating in large disorderly bodies. All the prisoners were in an extremely exhausted condition, and displayed satisfaction as they were gathered up and marched towards water and rations.

At 6.30 General Chauvel was ordered by Lawrence to take over the command of all mounted troops and initiate a vigorous pursuit, which was to be supported by the infantry "as soon as the ground was clear." But some hours were to elapse before these orders could be executed. The troops of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades had to be re-assembled and mounted; then it was deemed necessary to water, as far as the position permitted, the horses of the 1st Brigade. Moreover, the New Zealanders did not reach Bir el Nuss until 8.30, when they found the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade still watering their horses. Although the main Turkish retreat was directed on Katia, it was known that the enemy's left flank extended through Hamisah, and as far south as Mageibra. As soon as the Turks had advanced on Romani, Lawrence had asked No. 2 Section of the Canal Defences to push forward the composite horse and camel column under Colonel C. L. Smith, V.C., towards Mageibra. Smith assembled his column (made up of two mounted regiments and a few companies of the new Camel Corps) at Barda on the 4th; his instructions for the 5th were to operate wide of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, and, using his mobility to the fullest extent, to discover and harass the left flank of the enemy. Chauvel ordered the 3rd Light Horse Brigade to move from Bir el Nuss on Hamisah, and thence to the south of Katia, in conformity with a general advance to be made further north by Anzac Mounted Division and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade against Katia as a whole.

By 10 o'clock the New Zealanders and the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades were mounted and moving towards Katia. The enemy was located holding the ridges on the Romani side of the oasis, but was apparently still retiring. Some time earlier the 5th Yeomanry Brigade had advanced on a line further north towards Abu Hamra. It was fairly obvious to Chauvel that, with the enemy in strength

at Katia, the prospect of overwhelming him with the reduced and tired ranks of the mounted brigades alone was indifferent. To give the British a reasonable chance of success, either the 52nd Division should have advanced earlier in the day, and held the enemy at Katia by a strong frontal attack while the horsemen outflanked him; or, if the mounted brigades were to make the frontal attack, it was essential that the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, marching on Hamisah, should turn the Turks' left flank, and so threaten their communications.

The regiments of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, when moved from No. 2 Section to Bally Bunion and afterwards to Dueidar, were at a considerable disadvantage as compared with the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealanders. Not only were they strange to the country over which they had to operate, but, with the exception of the little raid to Jifjafa, none of them had been engaged during the war in mounted operations. When the brigade advanced on the morning of August 5th, the troopers were equipped for only one day's work. They carried no tunics or great-coats, and rode out in their shirt-sleeves. They remained in a forward position without additional clothing until August 21st; so short were they of equipment generally that the stretcher-bearers tore up their shirts to make bandages for the wounded, and then went naked to the waist. Water for the horses was found in the hods, and for some days the animals were fed solely on the harvest of dates, which they ate greedily. But, if Antill's brigade was lacking in experience of mounted operations, and was indifferently equipped, its regiments as they advanced to Hamisah were in hard condition and very keen for action. They had a definite flanking mission which, if carried out boldly, promised results of first-class importance. But that day they were unlucky in their brigade leadership.

At 9 a.m. the advance-guard, a squadron of the 9th Light Horse Regiment, under Major H. M. Parsons,³ discovered the enemy occupying a high ridge before Hamisah. Parsons halted his men and waited for Lieutenant-Colonel Scott to

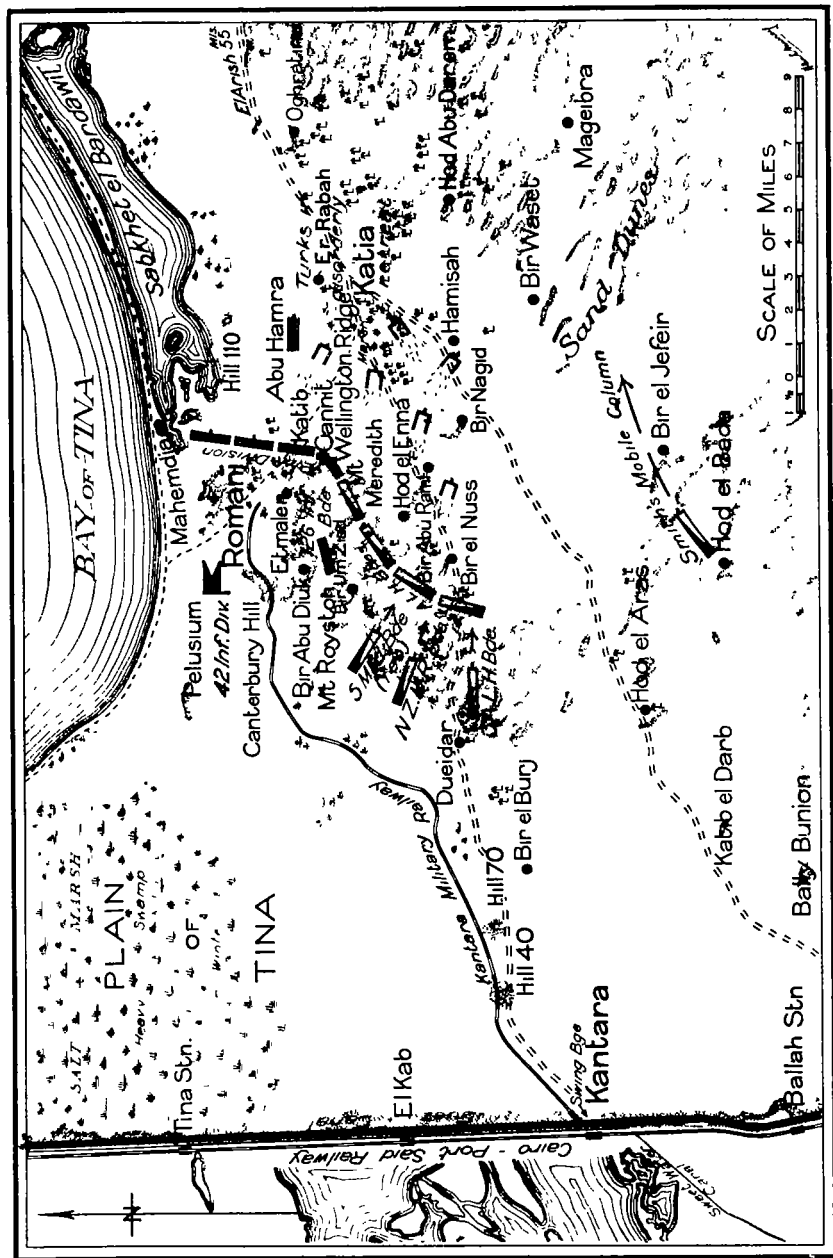
³ Col. H. M. Parsons, D.S.O., V.D., 9th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Victor Harbour, S. Aust., b. Inman Valley, S. Aust., 22 March, 1880.

come up with the remainder of the regiment. Scott had the choice of at once sending back his horses and making a prolonged advance on foot, or dashing at the gallop for some low ground beneath the hill on which the Turks were posted. With the spirit which marked him through the campaign, he decided to go in mounted. Parsons led his squadron against the centre, while two squadrons were sent to work round, one on either side. In the rush forward Parsons' men suffered very few casualties, although under heavy fire—during the whole war the Turks shot badly if resolutely galloped at. The squadron reached shelter a few hundred yards away from the enemy's line, where his fire passed harmlessly over them, and there Parsons dismounted his men and led them up the rise. A group of German machine-gunners, who began to give trouble, was promptly put out of action by the Inverness Battery.

Meanwhile the squadron sent to the right had worked round the enemy's left flank, where it was joined by a squadron of the 10th Light Horse Regiment, and effective enfilade fire was opened on the enemy. The Turkish commander signalled for support from the 5.9-inch guns behind Katia, and these joined in the fight. But either the range was extreme or the shooting faulty, for most of the shells fell short of the Australians and pitched among a force of Turks, who, mistaking the bombardment for British, at once hoisted the white flag. Immediately that the fight opened, the Turkish camel convoy retired from the rear, and soon afterwards the infantry began to evacuate the position. The Australian advance, capably supported by machine-guns, was now everywhere being pushed on foot; but some bodies of light horse were still mounted, and one troop, led by Sergeant Sharp,⁴ of the 9th Regiment, raced forward to the cover of a knoll and dismounted for action within fifty yards of the Turks' firing line. This proved the decisive movement of the little engagement. As Sharp's handful of men left their horses and dashed forward with the bayonet, the enemy force surrendered. The prisoners numbered 425; seven machine-guns were also captured. The fight was a good example of the effect upon Turkish morale

⁴ Lieut. R. C. Sharp, M.C., 9th L.H. Regt. Stockman; of Sturt District, S. Aust.; b. Unley, S. Aust., 1 March, 1888.

Map No. 6



ROMANI—POSITION AT 5 A.M., 5TH AUGUST, 1916.

of bold tactics swiftly executed. The enemy was shaken by the galloping of the horsemen against the strong front of his position, and then demoralised by the suddenness with which his flank was enveloped and raked with fire. The attitude of the Germans towards the Turks was significantly indicated during the engagement. Twice, as parties of Turks raised the white flag, they were instantly fired upon by the German machine-gunners. The Australian casualties included Lieutenant A. D. Palmer,⁵ of the 9th, who was mortally wounded while directing the fire of two machine-guns in the open.

Antill had opened brilliantly. Hamisah lies four or five miles south-south-west of Katia. He had pierced the extended flank-guard of the Turks, and isolated their force towards Mageibra. The engagement had lasted for less than two hours, and there was still ample time for a further strong advance before darkness. The prisoners were collected by 4 p.m., at the time when Chauvel's brigades were closing on Katia. Antill's casualties had been trifling; the men, although somewhat short of drinking water, were still fresh; moreover, they were excited with their first mounted achievement, and were eager to push on. But, as the regiments re-formed after the engagement, they came under light shell-fire from the enemy's distant guns; and Antill, after losing a couple of priceless hours, decided to fall back to Nagid, where he spent the night. Chauvel was thus deprived of the co-operation of a brigade which, in its strength and the condition of its men and horses, was equal to any two of those he had led to Katia. The Hamisah engagement, beyond showing that the 8th, 9th, and 10th Light Horse Regiments, fighting for the first time as mounted troops, were made of the same spirited and stern stuff as the men of the 1st and 2nd Brigades, was of very little consequence.

It was 2.30 p.m. before the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, the New Zealanders, and the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade moved definitely against the Katia position. The enemy still occupied Abu Hamra with a light rear-guard, and the 52nd Division advanced against him there only at the

⁵ Lieut. A. D. Palmer, 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Draper; b. Mount Gambier, S. Aust., 15 Jan., 1895. Died of wounds, 6 Aug., 1916

time when the mounted brigades commenced their march. The 42nd Division followed the mounted troops; but two of its brigades were not yet east of Bir el Nuss, while the headquarters of the 125th Brigade was about Mount Royston, and it was plain that the division could not expect to engage the enemy before dark. At about 3.30 the four mounted brigades were riding down on Katia, the order from right to left being New Zealanders, the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, and the yeomanry on the left flank.

As the mounted troops advanced from Romani, they had complete evidence of the enemy's demoralisation. They rode down hundreds of straggling Turks, who made no show of resistance, and the desert was thickly littered with arms, munitions, and equipment. This prompted the conclusion that the main retreating force, when overtaken, would be found in confusion; and it was hoped that, even if the infantry failed to reach Katia during daylight, a vigorous assault by the mounted brigades alone would be rewarded by the capture of the enemy's heavy guns and the possible surrender of his entire force. But this confident anticipation proved ill-founded. The Turks had left part of their reserves around Katia, where they occupied a position very difficult to assail; as their battered troops trailed in from Romani, they were revived with water and at once thrown into position. Their line ran along the west and north of the palm hods which marked the oasis, and, except on the left, was covered by a salt-water swamp some 2,000 yards in width. In front of this swamp, on the British side, lay a narrow, bare salt-pan, stretching for a few miles north and south; and from the edge of this little plain the broken hillocky country extended west to the sands of Romani. Although not entrenched, the position gave the Turkish riflemen good cover about the trunks of the palms, and they broke down great quantities of branches to add to their concealment. They had succeeded in saving most of their machine-guns, which were now well placed and hidden from observation; their heavier guns—with the exception of a few mountain pieces which they had taken forward to Romani on the night of the 3rd, and lost—were well placed in their rear, probably about Hod el Negiliat, and were in very little danger from the

batteries of the gallant but comparatively feeble British horse artillery.

The three Anzac brigades formed line at the western edge of the naked salt-pan, and then, fixing bayonets, charged mounted towards the Turkish position. This was the first time in the campaign that bayonets had been drawn by the men in the saddle. Obviously the weapon could not be used effectively from horseback, even if the regiments succeeded in charging into the ranks of the enemy. But, with the Turks shaken as they were, it was thought that the moral effect of the flashing steel might serve a useful purpose. If the salt-pan had extended right up to the enemy riflemen, this hope might have been realised; but the swamp between the little stretch of level ground and the palm hods which sheltered the enemy soon put an end to the galloping advance.

Shouting loudly, and with bayonets glinting in the strong sunshine, the long charging line of the three brigades thundered across the hard ground of the basin. It was the first essay of the Australians and New Zealanders in a cavalry charge, and the men forgot their exhaustion in the wild elation of the moment. But their exhilaration was short-lived. As the leading horses reached the swamp, they immediately floundered to a standstill, bogged to their knees; as the successive waves of riders heaped up, they offered for a few moments a rare target to the enemy. But leaders were quick to appreciate the position, and orders were given to dismount and continue the advance on foot. The horses were galloped back to cover, while the riflemen laboured slowly through the morass.

On the extreme left the 5th Yeomanry Brigade found the enemy strongly entrenched at Er Rabah, and, coming under heavy machine-gun and artillery fire, was definitely checked. The 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades continued to flounder through the swamp. All along the line the advance was marked by bold and confident leadership. On the right the 5th Light Horse Regiment and the Aucklands of the New Zealand Brigade were ordered to gallop at a large palm hod about half-a-mile to the south of Katia, which was separated from the main oasis by the swamp. This hod was believed to contain a number of the enemy's heavy guns.

The two regiments, with fixed bayonets, charged for half-a-mile, and entered the palms, only to find them deserted. As they galloped up they came under heavy fire from artillery and machine-guns, which, shortening the range, played upon the palms and made further mounted advance impossible.

Wilson, of the 5th, who had his horse shot under him in the gallop up, dismounted his men, and, together with the Aucklands, worked round on foot towards the right. But progress was slow and expensive. Wilson found that the main Katia oasis was strongly held by machine-guns and a superior force of riflemen, and although his force advanced for nearly a mile, there was at no time any prospect of reaching a decision before nightfall. The 5th Light Horse Regiment suffered twenty-eight casualties, and the quality of the leadership was shown by the fact that, among the officers, Majors W. L. F. Wright⁶ and A. G. Bolingbroke,⁷ Captains W. Chatham⁸ and J. G. D. McNeill,⁹ and Lieutenants R. A. N. Plant¹⁰ and F. M. Waite¹¹ were all wounded. The failure of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade on the right to advance beyond Hamisah, and the early check to the Yeomanry Brigade on the left, reduced the assault to a direct frontal advance by three weak brigades with both flanks open.

Meanwhile the men of the 2nd Brigade had picked their way slowly through the swamp until they were within from 600 to 1,000 yards of the enemy. But the men had now been three days without sleep, except for occasional snatches, and a light horse line fighting dismounted is always very thin. If the men are fresh and the ground favourable, they are, compared with the heavily loaded infantry, very fast in approach, and their speed compensates for their weakness. But, floundering as they now were in the bog, their advance was both slow and feeble, and their fire-strength was

⁶ Maj W. L. F. Wright, 5th L.H. Regt Clerk; of Brisbane, Q'land, b. Brisbane, 6 Sept., 1870.

⁷ Maj A. G. Bolingbroke, D.S.O. 5th L.H. Regt. Accountant; of Charleville, Q'land, b. Melchbourne, Bedfordshire, Eng, 26 Jan., 1880.

⁸ Maj W. Chatham, 5th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Warwick, Q'land; b. Cradley Heath, Staffs, Eng, 4 Oct., 1882.

⁹ Maj J. G. D. McNeill, 5th L.H. Regt. Assistant stock inspector; of Bangalow, N.S.W., and Townsville, Q'land; b. Moree, N.S.W., 18 Dec., 1893.

¹⁰ Capt. R. A. N. Plant, V.D.; 5th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Cairns, Q'land, 28 Sept., 1884. Died, 24 Dec., 1937.

¹¹ Capt. F. M. Waite, M.C. 5th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Brisbane, Q'land, b. Walthamstow, Essex, Eng., 4 June, 1880.

insufficient to shift the well-placed enemy. Lawrence in a message to Chauvel that morning had said he was sure the latter's division would "continue to show in the pursuit the magnificent spirit of yesterday." The same spirit was at work, but the task was impossible. The 1st Light Horse Brigade was similarly handicapped, and before dusk the whole line was at a standstill.

The supporting batteries of horse artillery advanced close, and sustained an unequal duel against the heavier and more numerous guns of the enemy; but, whereas the former were in the open, the Austrian and German gunners were well concealed, and the British shot without serious effect. Chauvel, whose advanced-headquarters was three miles behind, saw towards evening that there was no chance of the fight developing in his favour, and soon after sunset he ordered a general withdrawal. The Turks made no effort to advance as the regiments retired. The Anzac horses and riders were utterly spent, and most of the men slept in the saddle as they marched back towards Romani. The New Zealand Brigade, after leaving officers' patrols to watch the enemy, spent the night at Hod Abu Adi near Mount Meredith, while the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades marched on to Etmalier and Romani, which they reached about midnight.

At this stage the Turks had suffered about 5,250 battle casualties—1,250 dead were subsequently buried by the British, 4,000 were estimated as having been wounded; they had also lost forty-nine officers and 3,900 other ranks as prisoners. But they had made good their retirement, and had so far escaped with most of their guns. The Katia engagement had been a pure rear-guard operation; and the enemy's leaders admitted the resolution with which the Australians and New Zealanders had pressed the attack on the oasis, and the precariousness of their own position there, by ordering a further retirement immediately after the fall of darkness on the 5th. As Chauvel's jaded horses were dragging their way back towards Romani to water, the Turkish officers were urging their equally exhausted troops eastwards towards Oghratina. Both sides had been reduced to prostration by the desert.

When the light horse reached camp, the men of the 2nd

and 3rd Regiments had been fifty-nine hours constantly in the saddle or in the firing line. A large number of their horses had for the same period been entirely without water; for, although orders to water had been given more than once during the operation many of the animals could not at the moment be released from the action. The horses of one squadron of the 6th Regiment had not been watered on the night of the 3rd, and actually went sixty hours without a drink. These wonderful walers were so exhausted on the march to Katia that, despite all their spirit, they lay down in the sand at each temporary halt, but, when urged by their riders, responded gamely and carried them forward. As they approached the oasis where they had frequently been watered on reconnaissance, they revived and engaged with spirit in the final gallop before the dismounted attack; they also carried their riders back that night to Romani. Such endurance becomes the more remarkable when it is remembered that, owing to the intense heat, the horses on the desert refused food when they had been more than a few hours without drink. Their capacity to suffer and continue working, as disclosed upon Sinai, was unsuspected even by their Australian riders.

By the morning of August 6th the Turks had established a clear gap of many miles between their rear-guard and the main strength of the British cavalry, and the plight of Chauvel's horses and men made further pursuit by all the brigades temporarily impossible. But Lawrence in a message to Chauvel on the evening of the 5th hoped that with his three "fresh" brigades (the New Zealanders, the 3rd Light Horse, and the Yeomanry) the pursuit to-morrow would be pushed to "the utmost limit and any small resistance broken through." The New Zealand Brigade therefore rode forward at dawn, closely followed by the 5th Yeomanry Brigade, and, after finding Katia clear, made strong touch with the Turkish rear-guard towards Oghratina. At the same time Chauvel ordered the 3rd Light Horse Brigade to Hod el Sagia on the south; and, thrusting vigorously but without serious fighting, Antill's advance-guard reached Hod Abu Darem. The Turkish rear, however, bristled with resistance, and no opportunity offered for an attack by the horsemen.

If Chauvel's troops, and especially the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, were in a sorry condition on the morning of the 6th, they were not nearly so reduced as some of the infantry. As we have seen, the 52nd Division on the morning of the 5th was fresh and strong in its posts between Mahemdia and Katib Gannit. They might by vigorous action have reached Katia in the forenoon. But they did not move from their defences until the horsemen advanced at 2.30 in the afternoon, and by dusk they had covered only a few miles, and were out of touch with the enemy during the Katia engagement. While, however, the Lowlanders of this division—who had had a few weeks' experience of the desert, and were hard and capable of forced marching—were carefully nursed, a cruel and hopeless task was set the soft, green troops of the 42nd. All day in the furnace-heat these East Lancashires were urged forward from about Bir el Nuss towards Katia, with most disastrous results. Most of the hardy, acclimatised Australians and New Zealanders had fought Romani on the 4th on one quart bottle of water to each man, and had advanced on Katia on the 5th with the same short allowance. But the Anzacs knew how to conserve their water-supply; and, since they often rode, and when on foot advanced light, they could survive on a supply which was quite inadequate to the needs of the heavily-loaded, inexperienced infantry. Before noon the battalions of the 42nd were showing acute distress; by nightfall, when their advance-guard approached Katia at the close of the engagement, their exhausted stragglers numbered thousands. As many as 300 fell out of a single battalion. Many lost their senses, and dug madly with their hands in the burning sands for water. Still more fell unconscious, and not a few died.

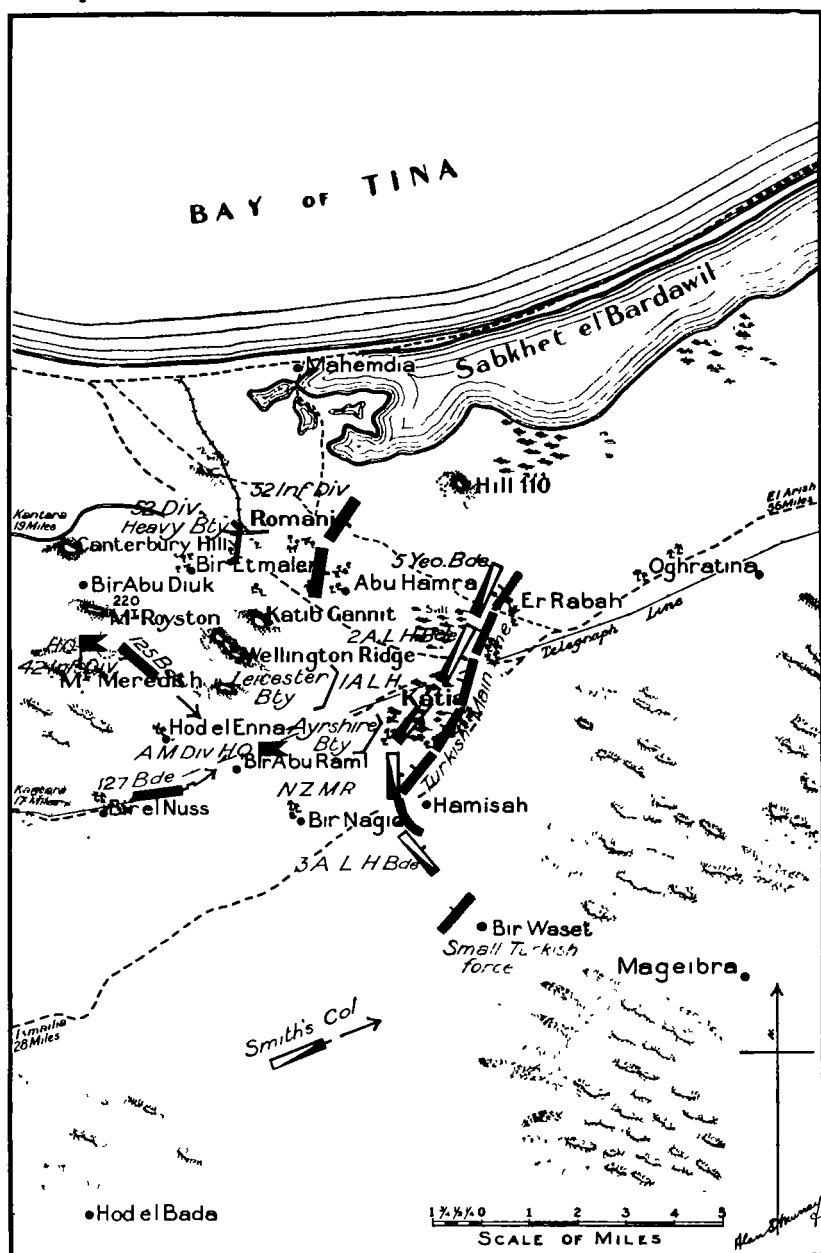
General Murray, who was being urged by the War Office to exploit the Romani victory as fully as possible, pleaded the temporary exhaustion of his cavalry and the indifferent quality of his infantry. Cabling to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, he said, "I cannot pursue with the vigour I should like, because the horses of the Anzac Mounted Division are exhausted. After a short march on the 5th, 800 men were missing from one brigade of the 42nd Division, and the General Officer Commanding the 52nd Division tells me that

many of his men are undersized and are quite incapable of sustained effort. The Turkish infantry is almost as fast over the desert as my cavalry. They are fine, active men, in good condition."

The New Zealand Brigade demonstrated against the enemy rear-guard at Oghratina on the 7th, while Antill endeavoured to turn the left flank of the resistance at Hod el Sagia; but again the Turks, whose organisation was hourly improving after their disaster at Romani, proved too strong to be driven or broken. On the morning of the 8th Oghratina was found clear; pushing forward, the patrols discovered the enemy concentrated on high ground immediately to the east of the well at Bir el Abd, twenty-two miles from Romani on the track to El Arish. It was then resolved to make a further attempt to break his rear-guard, capture his guns, and destroy the balance of his force. Recognising the impossibility of advancing the infantry so far, Lawrence decided that only mounted troops should be engaged, and on the afternoon of the 8th all Chauvel's brigades were moved forward for an attack next day. On the 8th Chauvel established his headquarters at Oghratina, and the New Zealand and Yeomanry Brigades camped there that night. Royston was temporarily given command of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, with orders to move from Romani, water at Katia at dusk on the 8th, and push forward in the night as far as Hod Hamada, four and a half miles north-west from Bir el Abd. At daylight on the 9th Royston's column was to march on a point two miles north-east of the Turkish position; at the same time the New Zealanders were to move direct on Bir el Abd; the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, keeping contact with the New Zealanders until they were abreast of the enemy's position, would attempt to swing round and reach Salmana, a hod about five miles east of Abd on the road to El Arish. The 5th Yeomanry Brigade was in reserve.

In its general features the fight at Bir el Abd was very similar to that at Katia, four days earlier. At Abd, however, the Turk not only occupied a position naturally as strong as that which favoured him at Katia, but had expended considerable labour upon his trenches and redoubts. His troops were no longer demoralised by a crushing defeat, or suffering from

Map No. 7



ROMANI-KATIA—POSITION AT 5 P.M., 5TH AUGUST, 1916.

extreme physical exhaustion. They had been rested and refreshed with water and rations, and had received considerable reinforcements which had not been engaged at Romani. They had about 6,000 men in the line, against a total of about 3,000 dismounted rifles under Chauvel. From his line on high, sandy ridges, freely dotted about with sand-banked bushes, the enemy looked down upon the advancing horsemen. Against Chauvel's four batteries of horse artillery he had probably quite as many mountain guns, in addition to several 5.9-inch howitzers. The task before the British force was, therefore, formidable; the only chance of success was, as at Katia, that the 3rd Brigade should succeed in beating down the opposition of the enemy's extended left flank, and in shaking the Bir el Abd defences by threatening his communications.

Regimental leaders, however, advanced on Abd in the belief that the Turks were very weak and that they had an easy day ahead of them. Royston's regiments were very light, some not having more than 180 rifles in the firing line. After riding all night up and down the steep little sand-hills which marked the route, some of the men at dawn discovered a few patches of desert melons, and "found them very good." But most of Royston's men had empty stomachs when at daylight a few 5.9 shells screamed overhead and, pitching just clear of the column, gave the first evidence of the enemy. Camels and convoys could be seen retiring from Abd towards the east, and all ranks were keen for an immediate advance. In the absence of Onslow, Major J. D. Richardson commanded the 7th Light Horse Regiment, and Major M. F. Bruxner¹² the 6th, Fuller having been wounded during the retirement from Katia.

At 4 o'clock in the morning the New Zealanders advanced against the centre, while the 3rd Light Horse Brigade moved simultaneously against a strong position, of which a formidable redoubt at Barda (about two and a half miles to the south) was the dominating feature. An hour later Royston with the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, pressing forward on the north, discovered strong enemy resistance on a line

¹² Lieut.-Col. Hon. M. F. Bruxner, D.S.O. A.A. & Q.M.G. Anzac Mtd. Div. 1918/19. *Grazier, Member of Legislative Assembly, N.S.W.*; of Tenterfield, N.S.W.; b Sandilands Station, Tabulam, Clarence River, N.S.W., 25 March, 1882.

connecting Bir el Abd with Lake Bardawil. The 1st Light Horse Brigade occupied the extreme left flank, with the 2nd Brigade on its right, and then the New Zealanders, with the 3rd out on the right flank. But the wide stretch of the advance and the lightness of the brigades necessitated a number of menacing gaps. Between the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealanders there was a break of about 800 yards; between Chaytor and the 3rd Brigade there was a space a mile wide, occupied only by one troop of about twenty men. Nevertheless the scattered force, after galloping in until the machine-gun and artillery fire became too heavy to risk the horses further, dismounted and advanced with great dash against the compact, heavily-manned Turkish position. Soon after 5 a.m. the New Zealanders were driving in the enemy outposts, and, pushing on, occupied high ground from which they looked down over the Turkish position on to the well at Abd.

Early in the fight the Turks began to disclose their strength and show consciousness of their superiority. Soon after 6 o'clock they advanced with the bayonet in a counter-attack against Chaytor's regiments, but were stopped and dispersed by the Somerset Battery and effective rifle-fire; a few prisoners were taken. Half-an-hour later the New Zealanders were engaged in a hot fire-fight, with machine-guns working vigorously on both sides. Royston's column was in position, and his two light horse brigades were finding the same stiff opposition.

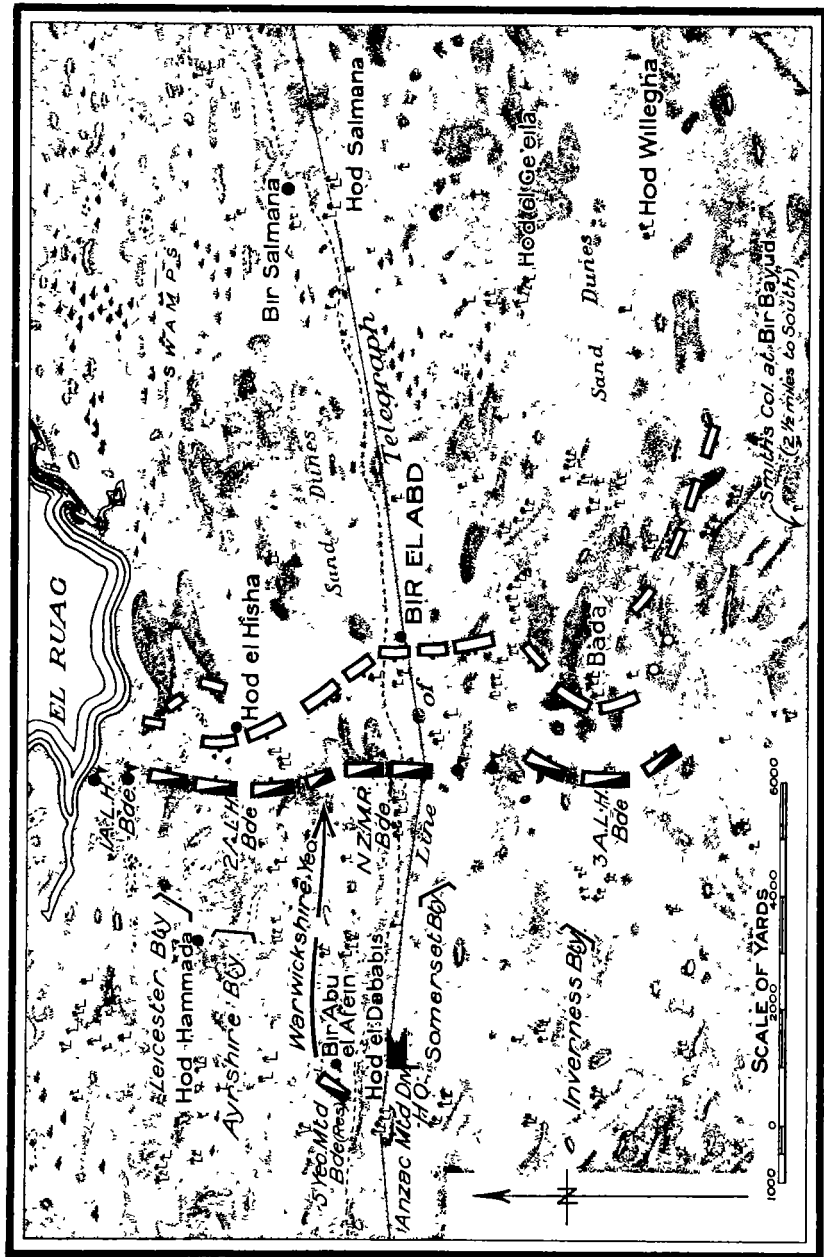
Shortly after the dismounted advance had begun on the left, a troop of the Wellingtons, about twenty strong, with characteristic Anzac impudence, made a dash at an outpost on a knoll occupied by about 150 of the enemy. The 7th Light Horse Regiment gave the New Zealanders covering fire; the Turks, notwithstanding their numbers, lost their heads, refused the steel, and bolted. Royston's whole line, as it advanced slowly across the deep sand, came under heavy fire from 59's, mountain guns, anti-aircraft guns, and sustained shafts of machine-gun fire, and was halted at from 800 to 1,000 yards from the enemy. At about 7.30 the Turks were observed to be working towards the gap between Royston's column and the New Zealanders, and Chaytor

ordered the reserve squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment on to the ground. An hour later the progress of the 3rd Brigade on the right towards Salmana was seen to have been stopped. Antill was then ordered by Chauvel to abandon that ambitious project, and to advance on Abd, closing up to the right flank of the New Zealanders, where a squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment under Major Cameron was being heavily pressed.

At this time the two New Zealand regiments—the Aucklands and the Canterburys—advancing with great resolution despite the severe raking fire from guns and small arms, seemed as if they would pierce the enemy centre; and this impression was strengthened by the increasing stream of transport leaving Abd and going east. But the 3rd Brigade on the right was at a standstill, and Royston was finding resistance on his sector stiffer and the enemy gun-fire more violent. By 10.30 a.m. the enemy guns were showing increased activity on the whole front. The duel between the German 5.9's and the plucky little horse artillery batteries was very one-sided, but the British gunners, pushing up close behind the dismounted cavalry, waged an unequal contest with admirable tenacity and reckless courage. Their relative weakness was emphasised by the failure of their observers to discover the enemy's heavy batteries, while the Germans, knowing the ground in detail, had precisely located the British guns. At about this time Chauvel asked for an aeroplane to assist the British batteries in locating targets.

The promise of the New Zealand advance was quickly dissipated; at 10.30 Chaytor was obliged to ask for reinforcements to support the 5th Light Horse squadron on his left, and the Warwickshire Yeomanry was sent in there. An hour later the British line, which then formed a rough semi-circle about Abd on the west and about two and a half miles from the well, was everywhere checked and safely held. But the Turk still seemed uncertain as to the strength of the attacking force, for he continued to withdraw his camel trains to the east, and even set fire to one of his dumps. The horse batteries found good practice on the retreating convoys, but at no time were they able to make any useful impression on the enemy's guns or his well-placed earthworks.

Map No. 8



BRITISH ATTACK AT BIR EL ABD.

If the Turks at any time in the engagement contemplated a general withdrawal, they did not entertain such a thought for long. Shortly before midday their line from end to end showed an ominous liveliness, and from now on they counter-attacked on every sector and threw Chauvel's brigades on the defensive. Their first blow fell upon the Canterburys, who, although greatly outnumbered, scattered successive infantry waves with most effective shooting from rifles and machine-guns. At about the same time one of the heavy guns found a target in the waggon teams of the Ayrshire Battery, and four men and thirty-seven horses were killed in a few minutes, and several others wounded.

Leaving their trenches, the enemy then advanced in successive waves upon the Canterburys and Aucklands; but the trusty New Zealanders, appreciating the defensive after their slow exposed advance, shot down the Turks in great numbers and, supported by the horse artillery, drove them back in disorder. Soon afterwards Royston made touch with the New Zealanders, and slightly consolidated the British position; but he was then heavily attacked on his left, where the Turks rushed at the 1st Light Horse Brigade with great determination. Simultaneously the enemy struck with three battalions against the yeomanry on the left of the New Zealanders, but the Warwickshires stood firm, and again the assault was checked. Antill was also in trouble. Obligated slightly to withdraw his line, he advised Chauvel that there was very little prospect that his brigade would break through the opposition. By 2 p.m. the enemy counter-attack was in full progress. Royston was giving ground on the left, and the position of the Ayrshire Battery became for the moment critical. Efforts to withdraw the guns were frustrated by the fire of the Turks; it was not until all reserves had been put into the sector covering the battery, and troopers' horses had been brought up to take the place of those killed by the enemy, that the 13-pounders could be pulled out. Meanwhile Royston's left was slowly retiring, and Antill's withdrawal was continued for nearly a mile.

Yet the position, if serious, was by no means critical. All along the front the regiments, even where they were falling back, were conforming admirably in alternate troops

and squadrons; and although under heavy punishment, they appreciated the rifle practice against the Turks advancing in the open. The shooting, though rapid, was marked by the steadiness which was always a quality of the light horse and the New Zealanders. At this time all the reserves of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades were in the line, and for two hours the front was maintained unbroken, although steadily retreating. As the Turks recognised the possibility of overwhelming the British force, their gun-fire gathered intensity, until it reached a degree of severity unknown by the light horse either at Romani or at Gallipoli.

Antill's regiments of the 3rd Brigade on the right had vainly attempted to make headway. At the outset tactics were tried similar to those which had been used successfully at Hamisah, and the squadrons galloped forward on their horses until they were stopped by enemy fire. Then dismounted rushes were tried, and men moving forward in successive troops under covering fire. At 3 p.m. orders were given for a general advance, but the line was too slender to dislodge the enemy, and very little ground was made. Two hours later the Turk, in conformity with his aggressive movement against the other brigades, strongly counter-attacked, and, falling upon the thin line of the riflemen, pressed it strongly. The retirement became general. At the same time the led horses of the 8th Light Horse Regiment were heavily bombarded, and many animals were killed. The men of Parsons' squadron of the 9th on the left held their ground until the Turks were within fifty yards of them, and retirement was further delayed by an attempt by Parsons and Sergeant-Major Shaw¹³ to carry out three wounded scouts. But the position became so critical that the men had to be abandoned. Two of them the Turks took prisoner; the third, who was badly hit, they immediately stripped of his boots and clothing, leaving the man himself in the sun. When the 10th Regiment came up to the support of the 9th, the line rallied and recovered most of the lost ground, and succeeded in carrying out the wounded man. An elderly trooper of the 8th, who fought in these operations, was

¹³ Lieut. O. J. Shaw, 9th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; b. Canterbury, N.Z., 3 Nov., 1885.

accompanied by his three sons, the family of volunteers making up a complete section. In the fighting at Bir el Abd he was holding his own horse and three others ridden by his sons, who were forward in the firing line. An enemy shell killed three of the horses, but the old soldier escaped unhurt.

By 4.30 Royston's left had been almost completely turned, and the 1st Light Horse Brigade in that quarter was still suffering heavy casualties. The Turks then threw between 2,000 and 3,000 men against Royston's centre, where the rival lines were only a few hundred yards apart and the rifle-fire on both sides was highly destructive. All day the New Zealanders had doggedly maintained their advanced position, despite the withdrawal of the 3rd on their right and the retirement of Royston's force on their left, and they were now badly exposed in the open with enfilade fire from either side. But still they hung on.

At 5.30 Chauvel ordered a general withdrawal. It was recognised that the breakaway would be attended with considerable risk, and that only the heavy ground could save the regiments from a hand to hand encounter with the superior forces of the emboldened enemy. As soon as the movement was perceived, the Turks assaulted strongly on a front of two and a half miles, but the stubborn steadiness of the individual men and their implicit trust in their officers saved the situation from disaster. Troop alternating with troop and squadron with squadron, and bearing their wounded, the long, irregular line of dismounted men fought their way back to their horses. Not a troop was shattered, and the merit of the movement was enhanced by the condition of the men. After riding all night, and supplied only with a quart bottle of water apiece, they had fought from daylight to sunset in the heat of a foundry. Tanned as they were, their elbows became blistered from the constant contact with the scalding sand as they gripped their hot rifles.

On no part of the long line did the Turks, in their counter-attack, succeed in making contact with the bayonet. To the right of the New Zealanders, however, where the squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment under Cameron occupied a low knoll, they pressed in very close. Cameron had his horses under good cover only 200 yards from the firing line,

and had been ordered to retire at 6 p.m.; but the difficulty of carrying out the wounded led to delay, and when the last covering troop left the position, the Turks were almost upon them and raced them for their horses.

Not only had Chauvel's mounted forces failed to carry the position, but the enemy by his strong sustained counter-attack had thrown the mounted brigades on the defensive, and had driven them off the ground. Chauvel's casualties for a brief engagement with mounted troops were heavy. Eight officers and sixty-five other ranks were killed, and thirty-three officers and 210 other ranks wounded, while six men were posted as missing. During the Romani operations a cablegram was received from General Birdwood asking if Antill could be spared for the command of an infantry brigade in France. Antill elected to go, and on the evening of the 9th handed over the command of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade to Royston.

Lawrence, who had been in close touch all day with Chauvel by telegraph, desired that, if possible, the mounted force should bivouac that night close to Bir el Abd, with a view to a further assault if the enemy should endeavour to retreat. Arrangements were made accordingly. But soon afterwards Chauvel, in view of the large number of fresh troops disclosed by the enemy and the exhausted state of his own brigades, decided after consultation with Chaytor and Royston to pull right back to Oghratina and camp there behind a strong outpost line. The 3rd Brigade, however, was left on the flank, and passed the night at Hod Abu Dhahab.

The total British casualties for the five days' operations were: officers, twenty-two killed, eighty-one wounded, one missing; other ranks, 180 killed, 801 wounded, and forty-five missing. At Romani on the 4th the 52nd Division had 195 casualties from shell-fire in their posts. The losses to the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade were light, and the 42nd Division was scarcely engaged at all. The great majority of the losses were therefore suffered by the Australians and the New Zealanders.

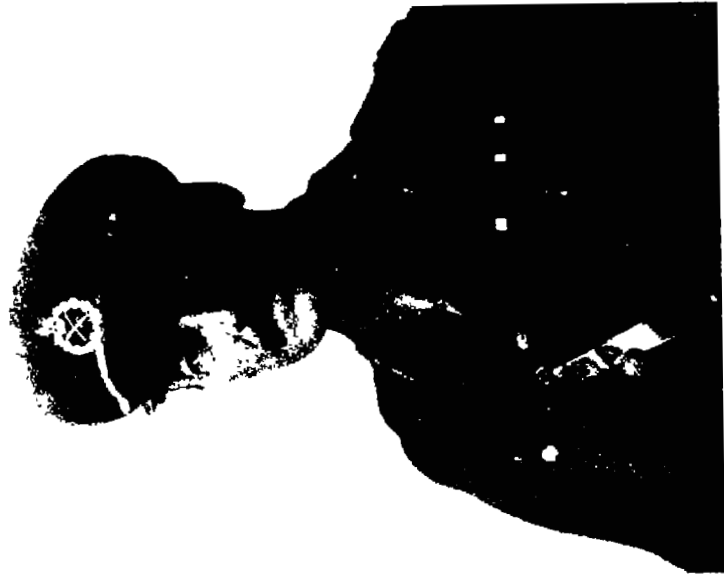
After Abd most of the wounded men had to be carried for some hours over the rough country on the camel cacolets, and suffered extremely from jolting. From the opening of



AN AUSTRALIAN "CAMFLIER" (MEMBER OF IMPERIAL CAMEL CORPS).

*Taken by Sgt. W. A. Smith, No. 1 Sqn, A.F.C.
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2465*

To face p 184



MAJOR-GENERAL HON. H. A. LAWRENCE, COMMANDER OF NO. 3 SECTION, SUEZ CANAL DEFENCES, JULY TO SEPTEMBER, 1916 (AFTERWARDS CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF, BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE)

Photo by Searns, London



BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. L. SMITH, V.C., COMMANDER OF THE 1ST IMPERIAL CAMEL CORPS BRIGADE, 1916-18.

Just II at Museum Official Photo No. B102

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the fight at Romani to the end of the campaign in 1918, the light horsemen observed a voluntary and unwritten law that no sound man should allow himself to be taken prisoner, and no wounded man should be permitted to fall into enemy hands. To a singular degree this noble pledge was observed. After two and a half years' constant fighting only seventy-three light horse prisoners had been taken by the Turks, and most of these were wounded before capture. Not a single light horse officer was captured by the enemy. During the same period the light horse captured between 40,000 and 50,000 Turks in an advance which extended in a straight line over 400 miles. The "law" concerning the wounded often led to heavy sacrifice, since men endeavoured to save those who had fallen, and it was more than once condemned from headquarters. But in the heat of battle it was always remembered, and wounded light horsemen with the fight thick about them had the satisfaction of knowing that, if it was humanly possible for them to be carried out, they would not be allowed to fall into the hands of an enemy who, if he fought chivalrously, was extremely callous in his treatment of prisoners; they knew also that they would be spared from the brutality of the Bedouin, who always prowled round the edges of the battlegrounds ready to tear uniform and boots from the fallen, and even to dig up and strip the dead. The 210 wounded who were carried out of action at Abd greatly hampered the withdrawal, but, with the exception of a few men whom the New Zealanders found it impossible to save, they were all borne back to Oghratina. Some remarkable instances of fortitude by the wounded were recorded about this time. The men so feared the camel cacolets that, if they could possibly be put on their horses, they preferred to ride. During the operations two Australians who were suffering from fractured thighs rode their horses for upwards of seven miles, and one of them survived.

With the fight at Abd the Romani operations concluded, although on the three following days the New Zealanders, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, and the yeomanry continued to press and harass the enemy's rear-guard. On the 10th and 11th the brigades, on advancing, found the enemy still on the battleground, and there was a desultory exchange of long-range

fire, but no close engagement. Early on the morning of the 12th the New Zealanders found Abd evacuated; but the enemy was discovered in strength at Salmana, where he was engaged at long range by the three brigades, supported by all the horse artillery. That night he withdrew towards El Arish. Chauvel's contract was completed. He had finally cleared the oasis area. From the opening of the fight on the sands at Romani, where the men of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades had fought superbly as infantry against terrible odds, to the last shots at Salmana, the horsemen under the sure quiet touch of their far-seeing leader had, almost single-handed, broken and then driven the enemy. But the Turks, as they fell away from Abd towards the east, had some sound grounds for self-congratulation. They had in their brief, disastrous campaign lost more than half of their total force; but, owing to the faulty staff tactics of the British High Command, they had escaped with all their heavy guns and much material. Romani had brought their ambitious project to a tragic end, but fortune had favoured them in the days which followed.

Throughout the operations there was evidence that, although so much plain warning had been given of the Turkish intention to attack, the blow had come before the British arrangements were complete. The 42nd Division was late at every stage, not because its leader failed, but because of the miscalculations of the High Command. So was the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, which could easily have been up with the New Zealanders in the attack on Mount Royston on August 4th. The same was the case with the mobile column under Colonel Smith, V.C., on the extreme right. As Lawrence failed to co-ordinate the command of the two divisions at Romani, so Murray neglected to co-ordinate the command of the No. 2 and No. 3 Sections of the Canal Defences during the operations, although both were vitally concerned. The result was that Antill with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade was released too late for the decisive opportunity on the 4th, while Smith was throughout controlled from No. 2 Section, and his work in consequence was isolated and practically worthless to Lawrence and Chauvel. But, taking this fact into considera-

tion, and also remembering the hurried manner in which Smith's little force was flung together, its bold, probing adventure without support on either side was a particularly fine performance. The column was made up of the 11th Australian Light Horse Regiment under Lieutenant-Colonel W. Grant,¹⁴ a regiment of City of London Yeomanry, and the 4th, 6th, 9th, and 10th Companies of the new Imperial Camel Corps which General Murray was organising. Moving from Hod el Bada in No. 2 Section, the hastily formed column found Mageibra evacuated on August 6th, and marched on the 7th towards Bir el Aweidia, about four miles to the north-east. There the advance-guard of the 11th Light Horse Regiment rushed an enemy outpost mounted. The Turks attempted to fall back on their main line, but Lieutenant F. G. Farlow,¹⁵ by a smart piece of work with his troop, rode down and captured fifty of them. Here, as further north at that time, the enemy was found to be in an exhausted and dispirited state, and disinclined to fight unless strongly posted.

The country was made up of groups of innumerable little sand-hills of uniform height, alternating with extensive patches of plain covered with short scrub; and so good was the cover that the advancing troops blundered on to small parties of the Turks before they were seen. The enemy's line at Aweidia was located on a long ridge facing north and overlooking a narrow plain. His position was supported by a battery of mountain guns and several machine-guns, which were directed on the little gullies from which the British must emerge as they advanced to the attack across the flat. Smith's force was without guns, and his only support for the rifle-fire was four machine-guns and six Lewis guns. While the light horse thrust directly at the position, the Camels and the yeomanry attempted to envelop the enemy's left flank. Owing, however, to the strength and the concealment of the Turks, and the very heavy nature of the ground, the fight did not develop. Communications between Smith's three units was indifferent, and, after a confused fire-contest which lasted

¹⁴ Brig.-Gen. W. Grant, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 4th L.H. Bde. 1917/19, and Anzac Mtd. Div., temp., in 1918. Pastoralist; of Bowenville, Q'land; b. Stawell, Vic., 30 Sept., 1870. Died, 25 May, 1939.

¹⁵ Lieut F. G. Farlow, MC 11th LH Regt. Selector, b. McLean, Clarence River, N.S.W., 1887. Killed in action, 25 Sept., 1918.

until dark, the British were withdrawn. At one stage some men of the 11th Light Horse got within less than half-a-mile of the enemy battery; but it was an isolated thrust, and could not be sustained. Major de Knoop, who commanded the four camel companies, was killed, and Grant had four men killed and Captain L. S. Alexander¹⁶ and four men wounded.

On August 8th Smith advanced through Bir el Bayud, met with no opposition, and discovered himself to be clear behind the enemy's flank. His orders had been to find the Turkish left and to harry it as much as possible, and these orders he obeyed with much enterprise. He was in reality groping his way about the desert, seeking the enemy. His information was bad, his supplies were uncertain, his observation was closely limited by the sand-hills, and he never knew before an engagement opened whether his enemy was an outpost or a substantial force. At Hilu, early on the morning of the 8th, the advanced screen of the 11th Light Horse Regiment rode on to Turks in some strength; and Smith, after reconnaissance—very imperfect because of the sea of sand-dunes—ordered an attack. Moving at 9 a.m., the Australians galloped within 1,000 yards of the enemy position, which, when disclosed, proved to be strongly held and supported by two 9-pounder batteries. All day the column endeavoured to get to close quarters; by 5 o'clock in the afternoon very little ground had been made, and about that time the Turks, who had been observed bringing up reinforcements, commenced a heavy counter-attack. They rapidly closed on the thin light horse line; but, although the Australians had several men hit, they fortunately had their horses only 100 yards behind, and together with the rest of the column they escaped with their wounded.

Smith then decided to retire and bivouac at Bayud. The lack of information possessed by the column was forcibly illustrated next morning. The force had camped, behind a strong outpost line, at the southern end of a long sand-dune 300 yards from the wells at Bayud. At dawn, as the men commenced watering the horses, they discovered that during the night a force of Turks had come up and dug in just beyond

¹⁶ Maj. L. S. Alexander, 11th L.H. Regt. School teacher; of Ayr, Lower Burdekin, Q'land; b. Mackay, Q'land, 27 April, 1886.

the British outpost on the east. The heavy sand had smothered the noise of the enemy—who were equally ignorant of the presence of Smith's column, which they evidently thought had retired to Mageibra. Their line of trenches ran south-west, while Smith's position faced due north. When the Turks were discovered, the British were already standing to arms, and their camp was about 150 feet above the enemy, who was only about 300 yards distant. A few minutes after the Turks were seen, the Australians and British were pouring a heavy enfilade fire into their trenches with rifles and Lewis guns; camels and other transport close behind the enemy trenches were also brought under heavy fire. The Turks, thrown into confusion, made no effort to fight, but began immediately to retire.

Hoping to envelop the force, Smith then struck in the centre with two squadrons of the 11th, while the third squadron rode round on the left and the yeomanry regiment on the right. The yeomanry, however, were unable to get forward, and the movement failed; but the country was almost impossible for progress either on foot or mounted. As the Australians advanced over the ground where the Turks had been entrenched, they found twenty-one enemy dead and the bodies of thirty-seven camels and fifteen mules. Smith then decided to retire upon Mageibra. The result was that neither side watered that morning at the wells of Bayud, as each had intended.

The Battle of Romani was the decisive engagement of the whole Sinai and Palestine campaign. Down to the morning of August 4th the Turks were engaged in a strong and carefully-planned offensive movement against the Canal. The British leader and the Government in London, if they were not deeply concerned at the moment for the safety of the Canal and Egypt, were nevertheless strictly on the defensive. Even Murray's plan to advance to El Arish, in which his Government now concurred, was designed solely to maintain his defence on the most advantageous ground. But the stand of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and Chaytor's counter-stroke had in a few hours changed completely the fortunes of the combatants; and the inevitable result was that both Murray and the Government took an enlarged view of the

significance and possibilities of the country as a theatre of war. At Romani the Turks lost the offensive, never to regain it; Chauvel's pursuit to Salmana was the beginning of the British advance to Aleppo. It is not possible yet to fix the precise moment at which the British Cabinet decided to swing from the policy of defending Egypt to the policy of invading Palestine. But within a few weeks of the fighting of Romani, Murray, with the full concurrence of his Government, was advancing eastwards to El Arish, and was ambitiously planning the conquest of Palestine. Romani was the turning point in the campaign.

Romani must therefore be judged by its broad result. Fighting on the defensive, the British force had first checked the enemy's assault, and then, after routing him and destroying half his force, had driven him from the coveted oasis area back on to the almost waterless desert between Salmana and El Arish. Few victories in warfare are absolutely complete; and it is folly to construct ideal conditions of leadership which might have led to the entire destruction of the Turkish column. If Murray had placed Lawrence in command of the No. 2 and No. 3 Sections of the Canal Defences, and if Lawrence had placed Chauvel or Smith in full command at Romani, the enemy would perhaps have lost all or nearly all his men, and all his guns and material. The arrival of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade on the 4th would have ensured the capture of Mount Royston in time for a general counter-attack before darkness came down on the field. A smart advance by the 52nd Division on the morning of the 5th, or a strong thrust beyond Hamisah by the 3rd Brigade on the same day, might have given Chauvel success at Katia. But this is wisdom after the event. The High Command did not excel at Romani, but the result was still a splendid and far-reaching triumph for British arms. And, considered from any angle, this triumph must stand almost entirely to the credit of Chauvel and his Anzacs.

The simple truth is that, so far as leadership went, Chauvel won Romani single-handed, despite all the fumbling on the part of the higher staffs. Had the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades failed to stop the enemy on Wellington Ridge, there is little room to doubt that, with the Section Command

enfeebled and disorganised by the loss of communication, the 52nd Division would have been isolated and destroyed. Never ruffled even at the most critical moments of the fight, and always forward under fire, the Australian leader confidently imposed upon his two brigades the supreme ordeal of battle—a slow fighting retirement in the face of overwhelming odds. It was the first fight in which Chauvel had carried a grave responsibility. He displayed that wide grasp of the whole position and the capacity for instant and decisive action (as when he was obliged to weaken his hard-pressed front on Wellington Ridge to hold up the still more dangerous enveloping movement on his right flank) which afterwards marked his work during the long campaign.

There was some criticism of Chauvel's tactics at Katia and Bir el Abd. The point was raised whether he paid enough attention to the Turkish flanks, and the suggestion was advanced that the frontal attacks should have been made by mere screens, while the full strength of the mounted brigades used their mobility to strike at the enemy's rear. If Chauvel had been supported by infantry—as he certainly should have been at Katia—or had his brigades been fresh and at full strength instead of exhausted and weak, this criticism might have been justified. But for Chauvel, with his tired and decimated horsemen, to have ventured through the enemy line and attacked it in rear, would have been extremely hazardous; considering that he commanded the only troops then capable of fighting the Turks, he would have been taking a grave risk of having his brigades destroyed. That was not Chauvel's way. He was engaging in no reckless gambling on the slender chance of a dramatic victory over the Turkish rear-guard. That Murray knew the extent to which he depended on his Anzacs at that time is shown in a cablegram he sent immediately after Romani to the War Office: "I have indisputable proof," he said, "that Birdwood has been trying to get G.H.Q. in France to agitate to have some of my Anzac Mounted Division reinforcements sent to France for the purpose of using them as infantry. I wish at once to make it clear that I cannot spare a single man from these reinforcements. These Anzac troops are the keystone of the defence of Egypt, and I am at this moment arranging to

form all reinforcements into camel corps. I know I can rely on your help in this matter, which is of vital importance to the defence of Egypt."

In view of this high appreciation of the value of the Australians and New Zealanders on the front, supported as it was by the many messages of unstinted praise sent to the Anzacs both during the preliminary reconnaissances and over the period of the actual fighting, Murray's subsequent official despatch covering the Battle of Romani caused much surprise. If the story of the work both before and during the engagement is read only in Murray's own expressions of opinion in the contemporary official papers, it is beyond all question that the Anzac Mounted Division fought Romani almost alone. But in the Commander-in-Chief's narrative of the engagement, as sent to the War Office and subsequently published, the decisive work of the light horse and New Zealanders is slurred over, and the British infantry is credited with activities which were not displayed.

Still more difficult to understand was the discrepancy between Murray's messages of appreciation to the troops and his list of awards to officers and men for service covering the period of the Romani fighting. The great majority of these went to troops recruited in the United Kingdom, and an excessive number to the officers of the Staff, which had blundered in the conduct of the fight from beginning to end. Had no awards been made, the Anzacs would not have complained; but the publication of a list so discriminating and unfair caused much discontent. Some months after Romani was fought, the Commander-in-Chief visited the Romani battleground, and went over the position in detail with a number of staff officers from the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and some British infantry brigades. At the close of this visit the Commander-in-Chief generously expressed to the Australians the opinion that his despatch covering the operations had been unfair to Chauvel's men.

Reference to this unpleasant subject is made only because it is necessary to emphasise that the Australians on the Palestine front suffered all through the campaign because of the absence of direct touch with the Australian Government. When misunderstanding arose, instead of being cleared up by

plain speech and open negotiation, it was allowed to continue, and to exercise a sinister influence upon the Imperial relationship. The question of the correct form of organisation to secure unity of control and administrative efficiency was admittedly a difficult one. No useful precedents were available. General Bridges¹⁷ saw far ahead when he took with him from Australia the nucleus of a base organisation, and provided for an A.I.F. Commander. But the system as it grew needed to be brought to its logical conclusion. The A.I.F. became divided, and parts of it served in separate and important theatres of war. It required in consequence a headquarters separate from that of either force. That headquarters should have been in touch with the supreme direction of the war, and obviously a representative of the Commonwealth Minister for Defence should have been available to direct its policy.

¹⁷ Maj.-Gen. Sir W. T. Bridges, K.C.B., C.M.G., the original commander and organiser of the A.I.F. (see Vol. I, pp. 64-9).

CHAPTER XIII

THE ADVANCE TO EL ARISH

FROM Bir el Abd the enemy withdrew his main force across the fifty miles of practically waterless country to El Arish. He left, however, a strong outpost at Mazar, some twenty-four miles east of Abd, and continued to maintain his garrisons in the great barren range of central Sinai, as at Nekhl and Maghara, and further east at Hassana and Kossaima. He therefore remained in a position to menace the right flank of the British force as it advanced.

These mountain garrisons were known to be weak, and by the middle of August the way was clear for General Murray to march on El Arish, as soon as he had a force sufficient for the enterprise and communications capable of bearing his supplies. But neither Lawrence nor the Commander-in-Chief entertained any serious thoughts of an immediate advance. The Romani operations, while owing to the work of the Anzac Mounted Division, they had inflicted a heavy defeat upon the enemy, served to emphasise to the British leaders the harsh terms which the desert imposes on its conquerors. Murray had recognised from the outset that the railway was an indispensable preliminary to progress, but he had not contemplated having to carry the pipe-line all the way from Kantara to El Arish. The indifferent quality of the water available on the desert convinced him that the rate of his further advance was the rate at which both railway and pipe-line could be pushed forward. What was still more disappointing, it had clearly shown that, even with the railway and the water-supply, British infantry was useless against the Turks on the soft sands of the Sinai wilderness. Sinai must be cleared by the Anzac Mounted Division, with the infantry merely holding the advancing base.

Murray therefore settled down to urge on the railway and the pipe-line with all the means in his power. But he had many obstacles to overcome. His labour supply was assured in the Egyptians, but the material necessary for construction was restricted by the increasing submarine menace and the

heavy demand from other battle centres upon British resources. Progress was at times miserably slow. The building of the line from Kantara to El Arish, a distance by rail of 110 miles, occupied nearly a year—which is far slower than the rate at which railway lines have frequently been laid against similar physical obstacles by civil engineers in peace time.

In the advance across the desert a simple procedure was followed with the forward army. The mounted troops maintained their reconnaissance on the flanks and in advance of the creeping railhead, while the infantry marched up from position to position along wire-netting tracks, which had been laid down to facilitate their progress over the sand. These netting roads were another valuable improvisation which came from an Australian suggestion. Wire-netting is sometimes in the summer season spread over the dry sandy beds of Australian inland rivers to make the passage easy for wheels. In Sinai it was first used by the Anzac Mounted Division, and was quickly adopted for the whole army, until hundreds of miles of tracks were put down both on the desert and afterwards in southern Palestine. A few widths of netting securely pegged gave a firm highway over any sand, both to infantry marching in fours and to light motor traffic. Elaborate, costly, and extensive entrenchments were established at successive positions along the route as far as Bir el Mazar, and these were a greater tribute to the offensive qualities of the Turks than to the calculated resistance of the troops under Murray's command.

Throughout the year the internal affairs of Egypt made a heavy demand upon the Commander-in-Chief's attention. No actual outbreak occurred, but seditious influences were always at work, and the position had been thought sufficiently dangerous to warrant the organisation of precautionary measures in Cairo and Alexandria, so as to ensure safety in the event of a rising. This unrest in Lower Egypt, together with the demands of his widespread command, now led Murray to a step which was to have a serious effect upon the Palestine campaign. He decided to withdraw his headquarters from Ismailia to Cairo, and obtained permission from the War Office to make the change.

At the same time he asked for the assistance of a general officer, with the rank of a corps commander, to take over the operations in Sinai. The War Office approved; Murray established his headquarters at the Savoy Hotel, in Cairo, 140 miles behind the advanced force at Romani; and Major-General Sir Charles Macpherson Dobell¹ was given the command at Ismailia, with promotion to the rank of lieutenant-general. The change is of interest, as showing Murray's strange failure to grasp the cause of the unfortunate confusion at Romani, which led to the escape of nearly half the Turkish force. He had been displeased with Lawrence's conduct of that fight; but now he was satisfied to delegate even greater powers to a leader whose experience up to that time had been very limited.

General Dobell had, early in the war, attracted notice by the capable manner in which he had cleared up the enemy forces in the Cameroons; but there the troops engaged had been few in numbers, and were chiefly made up of natives. On the western desert in Egypt the operations in his time had been of a minor character; and yet the Commander-in-Chief was content to retire to Cairo, and leave Dobell in command of a force of infantry and cavalry substantially larger and more difficult to handle than an ordinary infantry army corps. During September Murray asked the War Office for a siege battery, and continued his appeals for more aircraft. At the same time he complained that, when a recent lot of aeroplanes sent to Egypt were opened, it was discovered that the engines would not fit into the planes.

The close of the Romani fight brought very little rest to the light horse. When the men were not engaged upon patrol, they were worked hard at improving the wells in the area of operations, which were developed until whole brigades could be quickly watered at many places in the desert. At Mahadat seven wells became capable of yielding 19,000 gallons in twenty-four hours; at Barda sixteen wells gave 136,000 gallons; the Jefier wells, 92,000; Mageibra, 60,000; and Bayud, 46,000. But, with the exception of the flow at one limited well, none of this supply was fit for drinking by the troops.

¹ Maj.-Gen. (temp. Lieut.-Gen.) Sir Charles M. Dobell, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; of London, Eng.; b. Quebec, Canada, 22 June, 1869.

Early in September it was decided to make an attempt against the Turkish garrison at Mazar, some forty-four miles east of Romani, on the main northern track towards El Arish. The Turkish force was believed to be 2,200 strong, made up of remnants of the troops which had fought at Romani, and supported by four mountain guns, a few anti-aircraft guns, and ten machine-guns. As there was no water-supply for the horses east of Salmana, 700 camels were organised to carry about twenty gallons each to a point ten miles east of Salmana, to meet Chauvel's troops as they returned, and provide a drink for the animals of two brigades. The 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades, with the 1st Brigade as covering troops, were the main attacking body, supported by two batteries of Royal Horse Artillery. A few Australian companies of the Imperial Camel Corps, commanded by Captain G. F. Langley,² and supported by two guns of the Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery, were ordered to proceed across the sands to the south, destroy a Turkish post believed to be at Kasseiba, and then join up with the main body before Mazar at daylight on September 17th.

The engagement at Mazar was always afterwards referred to in terms of strong disapproval by the regimental officers who participated. Soundly entrenched, the Turks occupied a bare sand-ridge with a good command over the approach from all sides, although most of their trenches faced west. On the night of the 15th Chauvel led his three brigades as far as Salmana, and remained there under the palm hods during the day of the 16th. The cover, however, was but slight; in the afternoon the Australians were discovered and machine-gunned by a German airman, and a few casualties were suffered. The pilot doubtless informed the garrison at Mazar of the British advance, and Chauvel was thus robbed of the chance of a surprise assault. Soon after dark the 2nd Brigade, which was now again under Ryrie's leadership, and the 3rd Brigade, under Royston, moved out and marched for Mazar, while the 1st Brigade followed for about ten miles and then remained in support. Ryrie appeared on the west of the enemy's position at dawn, and the 5th and 7th Light Horse Regiments,

² Lieut.-Col. G. F. Langley, D.S.O. Commanded 1st (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps, 1916/18, 14th L.H. Regt., 1918. High School teacher; of Mansfield, Vic.: b. Port Melbourne, Vic., 1 May, 1891.

dismounting from their horses, advanced to within 700 or 800 yards of the trenches. A few small outposts were rushed and carried, but the advancing line then encountered sharp fire from mountain batteries and rifles at an effective range. At the same time the 3rd Light Horse Brigade had come up on the south, where Royston was looking out keenly for Langley's battalion of Camels. Langley, however, was late. He had found his route extremely sandy and slow, and in places the gullies between the dunes were so narrow that his men had to pass in single file. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade closed on the position on a very light front extending over two miles, with the right flank round as far as the telegraph wire on the east, which was cut. The whole line met with stout resistance; but the squadrons to the east were looking into the trenches from the rear, and all ranks of the 3rd Brigade, like those of the 2nd, were confident as to their capacity to carry the position without heavy losses.

Chauvel had explicit orders that, if the garrison was not taken by surprise and overrun in the first rush, he was to consider the operation a reconnaissance in force and withdraw. On no account was he seriously to involve his brigades. Royston, on the south and south-east, took an unfavourable view of the prospect; after the regiments had been held up for nearly three hours Chauvel decided at 7 o'clock to break off the engagement. Chauvel was doubtless influenced by the absence of the camel detachment, and also by the fact that, owing to a miscalculation by the native guide (a sergeant in the Sinai police), his two batteries had not up to this time



come into action. A further consideration, and one which always weighed with Chauvel, was the wretched prospect ahead of his wounded if the engagement should prove expensive. Langley arrived between 7 and 8 o'clock, after the brigades had withdrawn, and the division then marched back to the water dépôt. Chauvel was satisfied that, in the circumstances, he had correctly interpreted his unsatisfactory orders, and Murray fully endorsed his decision; but throughout the regiments there was bitter disappointment. The casualties of the division, most of which were suffered by the 7th Light Horse Regiment, were one officer and two other ranks killed, and nineteen other ranks wounded, while one Turkish officer and seventeen other ranks and a few Bedouins were captured. Lieutenant F. W. Slattery,³ of the 3rd Brigade Machine-Gun Squadron, was killed as he brought a machine-gun into action.

The ambitious scheme for watering two brigades in the desert—which in its magnitude was probably without parallel—was frustrated by the absence of proper arrangements at the dépôt. Sound organisation had deposited 14,000 gallons of water at the appointed place, but adequate steps were not taken to make it available for the horses. As the regiments arrived, there was a wild, disorderly scramble about the troughs. The water was exhausted before a large portion of the two brigades had come up, and many horses went thirty hours without a drink. The protracted desert work was now telling heavily on the horses, particularly on those of the 1st and 2nd Brigades, which had been so long upon the desert. They were much reduced in condition, and had taken to eating the sand and camp refuse. The horsefeed coming forward from Egypt and other sources was of wretched quality, and it was plain that either negligence or corruption was responsible for the approval of it at the base. After Mazar the 1st and 2nd Brigades were ordered back to the Canal for a richly earned rest.

The enemy's estimate of the strength of his position at Mazar, and the degree to which he considered it menaced by Chauvel's troops on September 17th, were shown by his evacuation of the place two days later. Romani, however,

³ Lieut. F. W. Slattery, 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqn. Carpenter; b. Bendigo, Vic., 1885. Killed in action, 17 Sept., 1916.

continued to be for some time the advanced base of the British army; but substantial mobile forces were now encamped in advanced positions to the east of that stronghold, and were also extended over the oasis area to the south.

From Romani could be seen, some forty miles across the broken and rolling sand-hills to the south, the gloomy, barren mass of the ranges of central Sinai. Waterless, except at occasional wells, and served only by lonely, narrow tracks which were always hazardous, and often impossible, for wheeled transport, these mountains were still in the possession of the Turks, and were a constant, if not a serious, menace to the British force advancing east along the seaboard. Murray's plan was to deal finally with the Turkish posts in the hills after he had reached El Arish; but it was decided in October to make an exception to the general scheme, and to endeavour to storm the Turkish stronghold at Maghara, from which troops had debouched by the passes during the Romani fighting.

Maghara, an old settlement made up of a few stone houses, is perched on the northern shoulder of the range, about fifty miles south-east of Romani. A narrow defile, in places not more than twenty feet wide, falling steeply through the harsh, yellow, sandstone rocks, gives the settlement access by the Wady Baba to the plain below. Running along the foot-hills upon either side of the mouth of the Baba is a narrow flat of hard ground, clear except for a few mimosa bushes, and showing signs of cultivation. From this flat towards Bayud, to the north, stretches one of the most desolate and difficult expanses of sand-dune country in all northern Sinai.

A column made up of the 11th and 12th Light Horse Regiments, one regiment of City of London Yeomanry, and 300 troops drawn from the camel companies, supported by two guns of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery, was placed for the raid under the command of Major-General A. G. Dallas⁴—who afterwards led the unlucky 53rd Division at Gaza—with Brigadier-General S. F. Mott⁵ as second-in-command. From Bayud, where the column assembled, to

⁴ Maj.-Gen. A. G. Dallas, C.B., C.M.G., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; b. 10 June, 1866. Died, 2 Feb., 1931.

⁵ Maj.-Gen. S. F. Mott, C.B., p.s.c. Of Northamptonshire, Eng.; b. London, Eng., 12 Jan., 1873.

Maghara is only twenty-five miles, and, allowing for the circuitous route through the sand-hills, the march would not exceed thirty-five. Over normal, well-watered country preparations for such a raid by a small mounted force would entail very little work or consideration. But, in view of the country to be covered, the arrangements were exceptionally elaborate. The force contemplated did not exceed 1,100 dismounted rifles; but water and rations had to be provided for men and horses for four or five days, and when the column moved out from Bayud its total strength, including native camel-drivers, was 5,000 men, 2,300 horses, 7,000 camels. The water-supply was drawn from Bayud, where a month earlier the wells had only been capable of supplying half a squadron in twenty-four hours. A squadron of the 12th Light Horse Regiment, under Lieutenant B. Lowing,⁶ worked constantly for a month at the improvement of the water, and sank and timbered to a depth of about twelve feet sixteen wells, which were capable of giving an abundant supply to the whole column.

Marching by the stars, the column, with Grant of the 11th Light Horse Regiment and Lieutenant P. Goldenstedt⁷ as guides, reached Zagadan and halted there for the day. That night, the 11th Light Horse still leading, the column moved on Maghara. The route wound through the intricate troughs among countless sand-hills devoid of distinguishing features. During the night a dense fog shut off the stars, but Grant, who had a phenomenal sense of locality and direction, kept on constantly at a sound pace through the sandy desolation. Shortly before dawn the horses came suddenly on to hard ground, and a little later, as daylight was breaking, the advanced screen was fired on by a Turkish outpost. The column had emerged from the maze of sand-hills directly in front of the Turkish position. Immediately the Turks fired, the leading troops, under Captain C. A. R. Munro⁸ and

⁶ Maj. B. Lowing, M.C. 12th L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Parkes, N.S.W., 29 Oct., 1881. Died, 25 July, 1937.

⁷ Lieut.-Col. P. Goldenstedt, 15th L.H. Regt. Adjutant 1st (Anzac) Camel Bn, 1916/17. Journalist; of Darlinghurst, Sydney, and Bathurst, N.S.W.; b. Glebe, Sydney, 31 Dec., 1887.

⁸ Maj. C. A. R. Munro, 11th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Lismore, N.S.W.; b. Swan Bay, Richmond River, N.S.W., 1 Aug., 1884.

Lieutenant Farlow, charged their outposts on the foot-hills at the gallop, although in the fog they had only the rifle-fire to guide them. A few prisoners were taken.

General Dallas's plan was to push the 11th Light Horse Regiment up the heights in the centre straight for the main defences; the 12th Light Horse Regiment and the yeomanry were to work round on the north, while a half-squadron was to advance up the Wady Baba, which led into the pass. But the fog which enshrouded the range concealed all the objectives. Dallas's orders were identical with those given to Chauvel at Mazar. If the Turks were in strength, he was not to risk his force, but was to consider the operations as a reconnaissance only; accordingly, after consultation with the regimental leaders, he decided merely to make a demonstration and withdraw. The 11th Light Horse Regiment was then ordered to advance on the main front, with the 12th to the right. After the long preparation for the raid, the Australians were exceptionally keen for a fight. Galloping across the narrow flat, they dismounted and advanced up the range with great eagerness. The fog was still heavy, but conditions improved as the men climbed. Covered by overhead fire from the two mountain guns and a number of machine-guns, they ascended a few hundred feet before encountering the enemy, and were then fired upon from a redoubt on a commanding hill. Taking every advantage of the good cover provided by the rough hill-side, a squadron of the 11th crept forward with the bayonet, while the 12th Regiment, on the right, kept the Turks in the redoubt quiet with enfilade fire from machine-guns and rifles. The enemy, who throughout was completely surprised, refused a hand to hand fight, and fled up the heights.

The light horsemen had now accomplished half their ascent, and the worst of the ground was behind them. The main Turkish position was in sight, and the squadron leaders were confident they could carry it without heavy losses. But communications were indifferent; Dallas, having decided only to make a demonstration, now broke off the sporting little engagement, and the light horsemen, intensely disappointed, retired. One Australian was killed and a few men were wounded. Captain Munro won distinction in the bold leader-

ship of his squadron and in a gallant attempt to carry some Turkish wounded out under fire.

From Maghara in October until late in December there was no further fighting. Lawrence advanced his section headquarters from Kantara to Mahemdia; the railway and pipeline were constantly pushed forward; as each stage was completed, the infantry divisions, which had now been increased to four, marched eastward in support of the mounted brigades. Murray reduced his troops in the No. 2 and No. 3 Sections of the Canal Defences to a light holding force, and concentrated nearly all his strength on the Katia front.

The British Government, still vacillating, was in October apparently less enthusiastic about the advance than it had been a few months earlier. During this month the Imperial General Staff informed Murray that the policy for Egypt in the immediate future must be, strategically at least, defensive, although the occupation of El Arish should, if possible, be accomplished, on account of its effect upon the malcontents in Syria and upon Arab operations in the Hejaz. Murray in his reply again expressed the opinion that an active defence of Egypt should rest upon El Arish. He also thought that his operations should be extended beyond the defence of Egypt, and should contribute to those of the Allies in general by endeavouring to prevent the withdrawal of any enemy troops from Palestine and Syria, while threatening the Turkish communications with the Hejaz.

In February Sir Archibald had asked the War Office for five infantry divisions. Now, eight months later, he had only four under his command, and these were 6,000 rifles below full strength, while a great many of the men were still inexperienced. In urging that he should be allowed to direct his campaign towards something more than the protection of Egypt, he pointed out that the Turkish position by October had changed to the disadvantage of the enemy, who was now being subjected to strong and continuous pressure on his many battle-fronts. The Turks had not more than 16,000 rifles in Palestine and Sinai, and, although they had three additional divisions further north, in Syria, they could not leave less than two divisions there, in view of the possibility of a

surprise by the British Navy. There was thus no immediate prospect that the forces in Sinai and Palestine would be increased beyond 25,000. Murray did not think that the enemy, even if he withdrew troops from the Caucasus, could bring more than 55,000 troops into southern Palestine by an early date in 1917. Murray was at this time clearly busy on an ambitious scheme for a general advance into the Holy Land; with his railway only forty miles from El Arish by the end of October, he had reasonable grounds for hoping that he might make substantial headway during the coming winter. His optimism was heightened during November by reliable reports that the enemy was weakening his garrisons at El Arish and the neighbouring posts, Magdhaba, Rafa, and Masaid.

Meanwhile the Arabs were doing well in the Hejaz, although it was clear that the Sherif's price would impose a considerable additional strain on British resources and shipping. By the middle of October the Arabs had received from Murray (in addition to great sums of gold) 3,260 rifles, thirty-two Maxim guns, an Egyptian battery of field artillery, four 5-inch howitzers, eight 10-pounder guns, and 18,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, together with nearly 4,000,000 pounds of rice, 3,000,000 pounds of flour, 71,000 pounds of coffee, and 420,000 pounds of barley. High carnival ruled in the Hejaz. Never had the Arabs been so rich, so well fed, and so heavily armed. Around every centre at which arms and munitions were distributed the desert echoed with the noise of miniature battles, as the natives, with the delight of little children, tested their new weapons, displaying a military ardour more picturesque and amusing than convincing to their few experienced British instructors.

Various suggestions were made to send troops from outside to the Sherif's assistance. Serious consideration was given to a proposal to land a small British and French force, to serve as a backbone for the men of the desert. Hussein at one time actually asked for such assistance, but afterwards declined it, on the ground that the religious susceptibilities of his followers might be offended if Christians appeared about the holy places. Finally Major P. C. Joyce was sent from the Soudan with 200 native Egyptian troops as escort to a flight of British aeroplanes, which were to assist the Arabs from a

base at Rabegh. Joyce afterwards organised, and led through all the subsequent fighting in the Hejaz and to the north, a small body of Arab regulars which, mounted on camels, formed the one constant striking force of the Hejaz troops. Lieutenant-Colonels Newcombe⁹ and Parker, Captain Lawrence, and a few other British officers who afterwards gave to the Arabs their impulse and their leadership, proceeded on permanent service to the Hejaz at about the same time. On December 26th Britain and France formally recognised Hussein, Grand Sherif of Mecca, as King of the Hejaz.

As the year drew to its close, Murray, with his pipe-line, railroad, and infantry slowly but steadily closing on El Arish, devised a definite scheme for his future operations. He expected that the Turks would make a stand at El Arish and endeavour to deny the favourable country of southern Palestine to the British, meanwhile safeguarding their garrisons in the Sinai Range. He therefore intended, when the 42nd and 52nd Divisions were within striking distance of the old village, to attack with his infantry, while his mounted brigades, under Chauvel, were to be directed on an enveloping movement of the position by the south. Having captured El Arish, the Anzac Mounted Division would be used to destroy the surrounding enemy garrisons, such as that at Magdhaba, some twenty-two miles up to the Wady el Arish. Raiding parties would then pierce the hills, and deal similarly with the remnants of the Turks at their scattered posts on the Sinai highlands.

The Wady el Arish roughly marks the end of the desert sands, except for a strip a few miles in width which fringes the Mediterranean. Murray reckoned that, with the village in hand, the railway could be carried rapidly over comparatively firm soil to Rafa. The British army would then be soundly based on the edge of the undulating plains of southern Palestine, with a good supply of fresh water close to the coast, and the road would be open to combined operations by infantry and the mounted forces. Murray, it is interesting to notice, already appreciated the importance of the possession of Beersheba as a preliminary to a definite

⁹ Col. S. F. Newcombe, D.S.O.; R.E. C.R.E., 2nd Aust. Div., 1915/16; Chief Engineer, Malta, 1929/32. Of London; b. Brecon, Wales, 9 July, 1878.

advance northwards into Palestine. Some weeks before, one of the British airmen engaged upon reconnaissance had looked down from his machine upon Jerusalem; and, although the British Government had not yet sanctioned an invasion of the Holy Land, all ranks, as they laboured over the last miles of the sands of Sinai, in which they had been imprisoned and restricted for eight weary months, considered an ambitious offensive campaign as assured. Murray certainly shared in the general desire, and lost no opportunity of urging the project upon the War Office, and of making plans in anticipation of receiving the necessary orders.

Towards the end of the year he asked the War Office for two additional infantry divisions from Mesopotamia, and for any further mounted troops that might be available in India. These requests, although they were not rewarded by any immediate additions to Murray's army, were not without effect upon the British Government; if Sir Archibald was not destined to lead an army to the conquest of Palestine, it was his constant advocacy of an offensive campaign that brought the country eventually under British dominion. To his optimism and true appreciation of the strategic importance of a blow at Palestine and Syria, rather than to any understanding of the position by the British Government as revealed by the official papers at any time, must be ascribed the initiation of the project to oust the Turk from the Holy Land.

On November 11th Chauvel, who then had the headquarters of Anzac Mounted Division at Mazar, received orders for a general move forward, as the preliminary to a blow at Masaid and El Arish. Never was an order more welcome to troops. Since the Romani operations there was scarcely an Australian who had ridden his horse at a pace beyond a walk. The men were, if not dispirited, at least exceedingly weary of the heat and flies and short water-supplies and heavy sands of the desert. Their progress towards the east after Romani had been constant, but movement had been so slow as to be almost imperceptible; as they shifted camp, they changed only from one sand-dune to another. For months there had been practically no sign of the enemy, and the only break in the dreary monotony of patrol work was the capture of an occasional Bedouin and a few camels.

In October Dobell had taken over the command of "Eastern Force," the name given to the army advancing east of the Canal; Lawrence proceeded to Aldershot, and afterwards to France, where he subsequently became Chief of Staff to Haig—a position which he filled with great distinction in the decisive and triumphant days of 1918. Dobell at once displayed marked activity in his command, and made himself familiar with the country and his divisions; and for a time the new personality had a cheering effect upon the troops. A further development made in the command about this time introduced to the campaign still another British leader, one who was to leave a strong and permanent mark upon the Palestine operations. Sir Philip W. Chetwode,¹⁰ a British soldier-baronet, who took over the command of "Desert Column" (the name given to Dobell's advanced troops), came to Sinai from France with an established reputation as a cavalry leader. In the retreat from Mons he had commanded the 5th Cavalry Brigade under General Allenby, and had done conspicuously well in that rare mounted company. He had fought in the Burma War of 1892, and had thoroughly mastered open mounted fighting in the South African War. A far-seeing tactician, Chetwode was graced with a strong, sympathetic, and attractive personality, which, as the Palestine campaign developed, won for him a very high place in the respect and confidence of the men of many countries who made up this rapidly growing British army.

Like all British leaders, with the exception of Birdwood and one or two others, Chetwode was some time in the field before he gained a correct appreciation of the Australians. Soon after his arrival in Sinai he complained strongly to Chauvel of the light horsemen's carelessness about saluting. He rode about the camps followed by British mounted orderlies, whose smart dress and precise and stiff horsemanship were in strong contrast to the appearance of the casual and desert-worn Australians. "Not only do your men fail to salute me when I ride through your camps," he protested, "but they laugh aloud at my orderlies." But just as Murray's complaints

¹⁰ Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, Bt., G.C.B., O.M., G.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., D.S.O. Officer of British Regular Army; of Chetwode, Bucks., Eng.; b. London, Eng., 21 Sept., 1869.

on the subject of Australian discipline ceased after the stand by the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades at Romani, so Chetwode (with one notable exception) was silent after the fine little engagements at Rafa and Magdhaba. Once British leaders recognised that the battle discipline of the Australians was beyond criticism, they became less insistent upon formalities, and shut their eyes to little breaches of convention in the camps away from action.

A preliminary precaution to an assault on El Arish was the discovering of water in the area for the horses, so that if necessary the attack could be maintained. About the beginning of December, therefore, long-distance patrols were sent by Anzac Mounted Division to prospect at night for supplies in the Wady el Arish, south of the village. These parties, which were accompanied by engineers with boring plants, probed the dry bed of the wady, but without success; it was decided, therefore, as the reports of enemy evacuation were apparently trustworthy, to rely upon the brigades to win quickly the water in the village.

The plan which had been prepared for an advance by the infantry and mounted troops was then abandoned, and orders were issued to Anzac Mounted Division and the new Imperial Camel Corps Brigade to march during the night and envelop the place before dawn. This movement, in which the 1st Light Horse Brigade was the advance-guard, although it passed without incident, marked a decisive stage in the campaign. It released the mounted men from the sands of the desert and gave them firm foothold upon the extreme fringe of southern Palestine. No night ride in the whole campaign gave the light horsemen so much satisfaction. They left behind them one of the harshest regions in the world, a region devoid even of elementary civilisation, inhabited by one of the most wretched of peoples, and offering no sustenance beyond the dates from the palms and scattered water which was unfit for consumption by Europeans. Through the prolonged summer, with its continual blistering heat and blinding sand-storms and its myriads of flies, the horsemen of the two Dominions had ridden and fought and worked incessantly. And now in the magical, idyllic atmosphere of a Sinai night in December, with the heavens thickly sprinkled with stars peculiarly

brilliant and seemingly very near, the riders rejoiced as their horses stepped suddenly off the deep sand of the dunes on to the wide firm flat which flanks the great Wady el Arish. "That night," said General Cox, of the 1st Brigade, "will always seem to me the most wonderful of the whole campaign. The hard going for the horses seemed almost miraculous after the months of sand; and, as the shoes of the horses struck fire on the stones in the bed of the wady, the men laughed with delight. Sinai was behind them." At dawn the 1st Brigade had reached the Mediterranean coast east of El Arish, and the cordon about the village was complete. This long night ride, over twenty-three miles of unknown waste, demonstrated the extraordinary mastery which the Anzacs had gained over the desert. The 1st Light Horse Brigade was directed to the east of the village, with its flank on the sea, the Camel Brigade to the south, the New Zealanders to the south-west, and the 3rd Light Horse Brigade to Masaid. When dawn came up, each brigade was on its ground, and none was more than 200 yards out in its calculations.

At the end of 1916 El Arish had been in Turkish possession for more than two years, and the inhabitants of the old mud-built village, which is the largest centre of population upon the Sinai Peninsula, had probably begun to look upon the change in government as permanent. Doubtless, too, the village had enjoyed great prosperity during the Turkish possession; for a substantial enemy force had been constantly encamped about the wady and in the noble plantation of palms between the village and the beach, some two miles away. But whatever were their true feelings in regard to the Turkish evacuation, the dramatic appearance of the Anzac horsemen encircling the town at dawn on the morning of December 21st caused the helpless, time-serving Arabs to greet the Australians with an excited demonstration of delight. As Captain E. A. K. Hudson,¹¹ staff-captain of the 1st Brigade, rode into the dirty village, the natives hailed his party as deliverers; the bearded elders, in many-coloured flowing dresses, crowded about the light horsemen, grasping their stirrups and kissing their boots, while the women and children swarmed shouting

¹¹ Maj. E. A. K. Hudson, D S O D A.A.G. Anzac Mtd. Div. 1918 Merchant, of Katoomba, N.S.W.; b. Erskineville, Sydney, N.S.W., 27 Oct., 1872. Died of illness, 27 Oct., 1918.

around them. The chief sheikh then formally surrendered the town, and handed over one Turk and a few spies. After Sinai, El Arish, with all its squalor, was to Australian eyes a pleasant, civilised town.

Soon after 9 o'clock aeroplane reconnaissance, which, as usual, was making the work of the mounted troops incomparably simpler than in previous wars, reported the surrounding country clear of the enemy. Chauvel ordered a strong system of outposts to be established, and the day passed quietly; but all ranks were restless with expectation of immediate operations against the Turkish posts within striking distance. Every trooper appreciated the significance of the changed conditions, and knew that the effectiveness of the mounted troops had been greatly increased by the firm ground for the horses and the fresh-water supply for the men in the country immediately ahead. During the day two men of the 1st Light Horse Brigade, who had served in Gallipoli, were blown to pieces by the explosion of a large mine which had been washed up on the beach. They had been bathing, and were examining the mine, when they accidentally touched it off.

General Murray had during the year lost no opportunity to increase the strength of the camel companies which had been formed in January. The horses of his mounted brigades had shown endurance on the sands far beyond the most sanguine anticipations; but the Commander-in-Chief continued to urge the establishment of a complete camel brigade; and by December, as the desert campaign approached its end, the new body was ready for operations. If this brigade contributed very little to the fighting on the desert, for which it had always been specially intended, it was a most valuable addition to the British mounted troops and its composition and work will always be studied with interest by military leaders.

The companies of Imperial Camel Corps were gathered into a brigade on December 19th, under the command of Brigadier-General C. L. Smith, V.C., who had led the composite horse and camel column with so much energy on the extreme flank during the Romani operations. The new force was probably called Imperial. It was made up of eighteen

companies, each of six officers and 169 other ranks, of which ten were Australian, six British, and two New Zealand. The Hong Kong and Singapore Battery of six mountain-guns firing a nine-pounder shell, manned by 240 Sikhs and Mohammedans who were ex-Indian Army regulars recruited at Hong Kong and Singapore, under six British and four native officers, provided its artillery; British personnel manned its machine-gun squadron of eight Vickers, and each company was stiffened with a Lewis gun section of three guns. Complete with details, the brigade included 1,210 Australians, 981 British, and 370 New Zealanders, in addition to the Hong Kong and Singapore Indians and 142 Egyptians, who, under a British officer, made up the mobile veterinary section. The brigade had from 1,600 to 1,700 rifles available for the firing line, so that its battle strength was about equal to that of two light horse brigades.

Of its four battalions No. 1 was recruited from Australian infantry brigades after Gallipoli; No. 2, which included six British companies (of which only four served with the brigade at one time), from various British sources; No. 3, from Australian light horse regiments; while No. 4 included two companies of New Zealanders and two of light horse reinforcements from Australia.

The use of camels for the transport of European infantry was first adopted in the Near East by Napoleon more than a century before, and in 1881 British Life Guards mounted on camels marched to the relief of Khartoum. For many years there had been at Abbassia, on the outskirts of Cairo, a school for teaching British soldiers to ride and handle camels, and when, in the January of 1916, it was decided to send a few companies of camel troops against the Senussi, on the western desert, this school was revived to give the necessary training. A beginning was made with four companies of Australians, the men being supplied by the brigades of the 1st and 2nd Australian Infantry Divisions. Perhaps half of these had been accustomed to horses before the war; but, except a very few who might have handled camels in central Australia, all the recruits were entirely strange to the animals when they went into the camp at Abbassia. Moreover, most of the Australians were enthusiastic about proceeding to

France, and were therefore reluctant to join the new service. The call for volunteers failed to provide the numbers required; the result was that battalion commanders, in detailing the men, discarded a number whose association with the infantry was not looked upon as satisfactory. But, if the beginnings were not altogether promising, the men of the first four companies entered upon their work with much heartiness. They found the camels strange and difficult, sometimes even dangerous; but, being Australians with a strong sense of humour, they also found them very entertaining and, as long as the new formation existed, they were one of the gayest and hardest fighting bodies of men engaged in the war.

Before 1916, three months had always been looked upon as the period necessary to train British regular soldiers to handle camels effectively. With the Australians and New Zealanders this period was soon cut down by half. A few weeks after the first four companies began to struggle with their ungainly remounts at Abbassia, the first company marched out to Sollum, in the western desert. The remaining three companies quickly followed, and for six months were constantly engaged in various operations against the wily natives of the desert. Their activities extended from Luxor, 400 miles south of Cairo, to the Mediterranean coast; at one time they made contact with the Italians in Tripoli. Their actual battle engagements on the western desert were of minor importance. Most of their work was a prolonged and exhausting patrol, to prevent the hostile tribes of the desert from raiding the Nile valley. Depending almost entirely upon a ration of bully beef and biscuits, they would push out from their posts in the terrific heat of the summer for periods of from three to five days, and then return to water. The khamsin season that year was particularly severe; and, if the men had little to fear from the enemy, they always looked back upon this time as one of the most severe of their four years' campaigning.

General Murray had been keenly interested in their training and their subsequent bearing, and it was due to the standard of efficiency reached by the four pioneer companies of miscellaneous Australian origin that the complete brigade was subsequently formed. Major C. L. Smith, V.C., who had

special knowledge of camel work, was brought from England to supervise the training. Smith's subsequent work at Romani, when his column included some of the camel companies, stamped him as a bold and clever leader; and, when, later on, operations against El Arish drew near, the brigade was hastily assembled under his command.

By this time most of the men were complete masters of their camels, and had discovered much to appreciate in them; but there was never between the stupid, unresponsive animal of the desert and its rider that warm bond which was so strong between the trooper and his horse. The animals used in the brigade were the big, white, riding type, fleet of foot and exceptionally enduring, which is found in the lower Soudan, and between there and the Indian Ocean. A man on a camel could without trouble carry five days' water and rations, together with a very generous allowance of blankets and kit. The animals could be packed with as much camping material as the resourceful Australian soldier could accumulate. But it was soon learned that the men who rode out to a serious engagement upon camels were engaged in a far more serious enterprise than those who rode on horses. If the light horsemen were approximately mounted infantry, troops mounted on camels were pure infantry favoured by a rapid method of transport. Camels could not be raced close up to the enemy position, or kept near at hand for a galloping escape if the enemy were found too strong, as at Bir el Abd. When once the camel troops dismounted, they were as definitely committed as ordinary infantry.

The value of the new brigade as an addition to the regiments of horse was demonstrated very early in its fighting career. Its superior strength and stability gave Chauvel's brigades a definite pivot of manœuvre during action, and the reckless fighting qualities revealed by the camel battalions allowed the fullest advantage to be taken of the new force. Chauvel now had in the Camel Brigade what he lacked at Katia and Abd—a considerable body of infantry which, unlike the slender light horse line, could attack a sector firmly in depth, while the horsemen could be moved about as the circumstances of the fight dictated.

CHAPTER XIV

MAGDHABA

WHEN, on the night of December 20th, the brigades moved to encircle El Arish, Chauvel was still without information as to the direction taken by the Turks in their retirement. Two routes were open to them. They could fall back along the beach by Rafa towards Gaza, or, travelling up the Wady el Arish, march by Magdhaba towards the railway at El Auja. Aiming to block both routes, if only temporarily, to the feared Anzac horsemen, they divided their El Arish garrison, and proceeded to improve two selected defensive positions, one at Magdhaba about twenty-three miles south-south-east of El Arish, and the other at El Magruntein, close to the Rafa Police Post, twenty-six miles east of El Arish along the coast. Early on the morning of the 21st the airmen discovered a force at work on a string of sangars around Magdhaba, and Chauvel pushed out strong patrols for ten miles along both routes to reconnoitre, and also to sound the country for water.

At 10 o'clock on the morning of the 22nd Sir Philip Chetwode, the Commander of Desert Column, landed on the beach at El Arish, having come by sea from Port Said. After consultation with Chauvel, he decided to take up the pursuit at once. Chauvel's men were then eating the last of their rations; but Chetwode, with a view to immediate operations, had arranged that a convoy with supplies should reach El Arish from railhead that evening, while the Navy was to co-operate immediately in landing stores from the sea. During the day ten Australian airmen raided Magdhaba and dropped 120 bombs about the settlement. The Turks retaliated hotly with rifles and machine-guns, and on their return the pilots reported that the place was held by a considerable force, supported by a number of light guns. Chetwode, who had been preparing a simultaneous advance towards both Magdhaba and Rafa, then decided to send all his available mounted strength against Magdhaba, temporarily suspending operations to the east. The infantry brigades of the 52nd Division were now marching into the El Arish area, and so

secured the new base of operations in the absence of the horsemen.

Anzac Mounted Division, less the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the Ayrshire and Leicester Batteries, but supported by the new Imperial Camel Corps Brigade (then three battalions strong) and its Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery, was in the early hours of the night concentrated at a point four miles up the wady. The intention was to cover before dawn the nineteen miles between this point and Magdhaba, and to encircle and surprise the enemy. As, however, one of the infantry brigades became entangled with the camel convoy of Chauvel's force, the concentration was delayed, and it was not until nearly an hour after midnight that the column, with a squadron of the 1st Light Horse Brigade as advance-guard, commenced its ride up the wady.

The Wady el Arish, which with its tributaries drains a large area of central and eastern Sinai, contains water only for brief periods in the rare seasons of heavy rains on the barren highlands. A brown, muddy flood then pours down, overflows the actual course of the shallow wady, and spreads out over the wide level flats on either side. In December, 1916, the wady was dry, and the flats deep in dust from the movement of enemy troops. The main track between El Arish and Magdhaba follows the eastern side of the watercourse. Chauvel's column had the wady and the sand-hills of Sinai on its right, and on its left the smaller sand-hills of the extreme edge of the desert region, which divide the wady from the fertile country of southern Palestine. At this time the Turkish railway had been extended from Beersheba southwards through Auja and across the Sinai frontier towards El Kossaima, whence it was to have been carried to Magdhaba and down the wady to El Arish. The wisdom of Murray's insistence on an advance across Sinai was clear. Had he been content to rest on the Canal, it is highly probable that during 1917 the enemy would have laid the line westwards across the desert to Katia, and the defence of the Canal would have demanded the presence of a great British force.

The advance-guard marched fast, and it was interesting to notice that the horses, moving for the first time since they came to Egypt on really firm and level ground, frequently over-

reached and stumbled. Speech and smoking were forbidden. The long column of ghostly horsemen was speedily blanketed in a heavy cloud of fine clayey dust; the only sound was the pounding of hoofs, the clank of stirrup against stirrup, and the occasional neighing and snorting of the horses. Each hour was (as is the cavalry practice) divided into forty minutes' riding, ten minutes' leading, and ten minutes' halt. Such nursing of the horses on this short night-ride might seem strange to the Australian countryman, until it is remembered that each animal carried from eighteen to twenty stone, and that the only way in which horses can be kept fit for operation after operation over a number of years lies in ceaseless thought for their welfare. The December night was bitterly cold, and the men, aching in their saddles, appreciated the spells of walking. Shortly before 4 o'clock the camp fires of the unsuspecting Turks at Magdhaba were seen by the advanced screen, and an hour later the head of the column was checked in an open plain four miles from the position Chauvel had intended to march nearer to the enemy garrisons before halting for the deployment of his brigades; but he and his staff were deceived by the brightness of the enemy's fires.

As each brigade arrived, the men were dismounted and breakfasted and the horses fed, while Chauvel, accompanied by his staff and brigadiers, rode forward to make a personal reconnaissance of the position. Dawn was now touching the heavens over Palestine eastwards, and the dark upland of Judæa could be descried to the north-east. As the enemy's bivouac fires faded, the valley about Magdhaba was concealed under a heavy bank of smoke, which made the reconnaissance slow and difficult. But with the assistance of Major Barlow, an Imperial officer who knew the ground and who was attached to the staff, the few huts and larger stone buildings recently erected by the Turks and used as a hospital were located, and the plan of attack was decided upon. So far, however, Chauvel was in ignorance of the position of the enemy's defences; as all the brigades had not yet arrived, he decided to wait for the appearance of his aeroplanes before committing his force. At about 6.30 the airmen arrived and, flying low, began to bomb the Turks, who, aiming at the pilots with machine-gun and rifle-fire, disclosed the position of their

redoubts. Shortly before 8 o'clock the first aeroplane report was received, giving the location of one redoubt, and also the satisfactory intelligence that no enemy reinforcements were in sight as far as five miles beyond El Ruafa—a well some four miles south of Magdhaba—while at Ruafa itself only a few men were seen. Half-an-hour later all the brigades were moving into position for the assault.

The position of the Turks at Magdhaba was well designed to frustrate any attack by which at that time it could be threatened. Having destroyed the wells at Lahfan, nine miles up the wady from the coast, the enemy knew that assaulting troops must be dependent upon the El Arish water, twenty-three miles away, and that, if he could resist for more than a few hours, the thirst of Chauvel's men and horses must terminate the engagement. Moreover, the ground strongly favoured the defenders. The few buildings of the settlement stood on the east side of the wady, which about Magdhaba had worn a rugged, complicated gorge some twenty or thirty feet deep in the clay, and was freely broken on either side by short rough bays affording the best of cover to troops. On the Sinai side, immediately opposite the settlement, the desert came down close to the edge of the wady in a rolling slope broken with many little ridges a few feet high, and thickly sprinkled with sandbanked bushes which gave good protection to riflemen. On the east, extending north and south, a flat a few hundred yards across flanked the wady; this was cut up by a number of small dry watercourses, splashed with bushes, and now, in the winter season, gay with anemones and hyacinths and other short-lived desert flowers. Beyond this flat to the east was a prolonged ridge dotted with large ant-hills and many bushes; this must be crossed by the attacking force. The enemy, with the heart of his position about the buildings, had constructed a system of redoubts, each capable of covering the next, at a radius of about half-a-mile from the buildings. Of these, two were on the east side of the wady, and the remainder on the sand-ridges to the west. Knowing that the British would probably approach up the flat on the east, the Turks had ensured that, before the main redoubts could be captured, the British must involve themselves in the crossing of the wady under fire.

Chauvel's plan was to keep his force as far as possible on the good ground on the east side of the wady, and to rely upon the speed and strength of his assault to drive the Turks across the wady away from their only water-supply at the wells of the settlement. Then, using his horses, he would cut off their retreat towards Ruafa. Recognising the strength of the new Camel Brigade, he ordered Smith to advance straight up to the flat from the north, with his centre on the telegraph line which led from Magdhaba to El Arish, believing that the depth and force of the brigade would carry it through. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade, commanded by Royston, and the New Zealanders were placed together under Chaytor, with orders to attack from the east and to extend towards the south. Chaytor moved into position with the New Zealanders on the left of the Camels, and sent the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, which he decided to keep in reserve, further south. Cox's 1st Light Horse Brigade was in reserve, with orders to be ready to advance on the right of the Camels. The Inverness and Somerset Batteries (which were under Chauvel in person) were to open fire as early as possible on the Turkish redoubts, and this was to be the signal for the general advance. From the outset Chauvel recognised the engagement was a gamble against time, and definite orders were given to all brigades that the attack was to be pressed home. The men were dependent for water upon the scanty supply of their bottles, from which many of them had already made morning tea; when the advance began the horses had been about twenty hours without a drink.

Immediately after the brigades had moved, the British airmen reported small mounted parties of the garrison escaping up the wady to the south, and Chaytor ordered Royston to send one of his regiments to block that outlet. The old South African soldier then engaged in a very bold stroke, which, as it developed later in the day, produced a substantial effect upon the whole operation. He personally accompanied the 10th Light Horse Regiment, which in this movement was led by Major H. C. H. Robertson,¹ on a wide galloping détour round the south of the position. At the wady the Western

¹ Brig. H. C. H. Robertson, D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (3) Yeomanry Mtd Div., 1917/18 A.A.G., A.I.F., in Egypt, 1919. Commands 19th Inf. Bde, A.I.F., 1940. Duntroon graduate; of Western District, Vic., b. Warrnambool, Vic., 29 Oct., 1894.

Australians took a large number of prisoners, and eventually assailed the enemy from almost due east. While the men of the 10th were riding hard on the south, Chaytor, without waiting for the Camel attack to develop, pushed in with the Canterbury and Wellington Regiments, taking as his objective Hill 345 on the other side of the wady.

The British and Australian airmen were showing great enterprise, flying very low and spying out and bombing the enemy's position; they frequently dropped messages informing Chauvel of the situation. At 10 o'clock a pilot landed on the flat close to Divisional Headquarters and reported that the Turks already showed signs of a general retreat by the south, so that Chaytor's left would perhaps not succeed in cutting them off. Here was the opportunity for Cox with the 1st Brigade. Chauvel immediately ordered him to advance, mounted, direct on Magdhaba along the flat between the wady and the right of the Camels. Cox, preceded by ground scouts, moved off at the head of his brigade at the trot, thus introducing a striking spectacular note into the fight, in which up till then very few of the combatants on either side had been visible beyond a short distance. After trotting for a mile, the brigade encountered shrapnel fire from the enemy's four light mountain guns, and Cox, extending his regiments into "artillery" formation, increased his pace to a gallop. For a minute or more the light horsemen enjoyed the excitement of a cavalry charge, as the horses fought for their heads, and the quart-pots and other gear clattered and pounded against the saddles. But the rush was brief. After charging for half-a-mile, the brigade galloped into heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from a strongly posted redoubt directly in front, as well as from a redoubt to the west of the wady on Cox's right front. Instantly realising that the report of an evacuation was incorrect, and that destruction lay ahead of his brigade if the charge was continued, Cox swung his regiments, still at the gallop, and took cover in a deep, blind tributary of the main wady to his right. Here he dismounted his men about 1,900 yards from No. 2 Turkish Redoubt, which had fired on him from his front.

Meanwhile Chauvel had moved his headquarters to a high knoll above the flat, about two and three-quarter miles from

the Magdhaba settlement, from which he had a comprehensive view of the whole theatre of operations except those of the 1st Brigade. By 11 o'clock the batteries had been for some time shooting effectively, but still the attack made little progress. The advance of the New Zealanders was harassed by fire from the redoubts on both sides of the wady. Smith's Camels were in difficulties on the flat in the centre, where the ground on most of their front was level and almost naked of cover. They were serving a good purpose in drawing fire, and so easing the position for the other brigades; but they were still a long way from their first objective, the No. 2 Redoubt on their right front, which had stopped Cox's gallop.

After some delay, Cox from his position in the wady sent forward the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Fulton, dismounted, to assist the Camels in their attack on the No. 2 Redoubt. At about the same time the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery came into action close to his headquarters, and the Indian gunners soon found the redoubt and reduced the activity of the Turkish riflemen. Fulton had four machine-guns attached to his regiment; making clever use of these, he further curtailed the fire of the redoubt, while his men, covered by the broken wady up which they were advancing, made slow but constant progress. A wide bay of the wady separated Fulton's regiment from the Turkish redoubt, and had to be crossed by the attackers. Its floor was level and naked, except for scattered bushes; but shortly before 2 o'clock the light horsemen were within 100 yards of the Turkish trenches. Simultaneously the Camel Brigade, with the 3rd Battalion under Captain C. R. V. Wright² leading, and the 2nd under Major J. R. Bassett and the 1st under Langley in close support, were rapidly closing on the redoubt in section rushes from the left. Further round on the east the New Zealanders were also advancing with great dash in the open and, being in full view of the Turks in No. 2 Redoubt, doubtless contributed to their demoralisation. After a brief pause to stiffen the lines for the assault, the light horsemen

² Maj. C. R. V. Wright, M B E, M C. 14th L.H. Regt Drill instructor, Aust. Permanent Forces; late Middlesex Regt., British Army. Of Mount Gambier, S. Aust; b. England, 22 July, 1882

of the 3rd Regiment, with Major J. J. Brooks³ at their head, and the Nos. 1 and 11 (Australian) Companies of the Camel Brigade, led by Lieutenant Cashman⁴ and Captain Creswell,⁵ leaped from the ground and dashed, shouting, at the redoubt with their bayonets. For a few moments the Turks punished them severely, but as the two bodies of assailants, each striving for the honour of first entry, flung themselves at the trenches, the Turks stood up in a body and surrendered.

This was the turning point in the engagement. But so narrow was the margin between victory and failure that, even as No. 2 Redoubt was falling, Chauvel was giving earnest consideration to the idea of a general withdrawal. He had not then learned of the advance of the 1st Brigade, but had just been advised that his engineers had failed to get water at Lahfan. After discussing the situation with Chaytor, and with Smith of the Camel Brigade, he telegraphed to Sir Philip Chetwode that no progress was being made, the horses had been a very long time without drink, and the attempt to develop water at Lahfan had failed; he therefore proposed to break off the fight. Anticipating Chetwode's approval, the following order was then issued to the brigades:—"As enemy is still holding out and horses must be watered, the action will be broken off and the forces withdrawn. Each brigade will be responsible for its own protection during the withdrawal." The order was handed to Cox just as Fulton's men were being pulled together for their charge with the bayonet on No. 2 Redoubt. "Take that damned thing away," said the light horse leader, "and let me see it for the first time in half-an-hour." With the fall of the position, the whole prospect was changed. Soon afterwards Chetwode, in reply to Chauvel, strongly urged that the fight should not be abandoned, even at the cost of some of the horses, and suggested that all guns should be concentrated on one redoubt, with a view to its capture with the bayonet after dark. So swift had been the development,

³ Lieut.-Col. J. J. Brooks, D.S.O., V.D., 3rd L.H. Regt. Chaff merchant; of Jamestown, S. Aust.; b Clare, S. Aust., 1 July, 1887.

⁴ Capt. W. P. Cashman, M.C., 14th L.H. Regt. Clerk; b. Coburg, Melb., Vic., 1896.

⁵ Capt. R. W. Creswell, 3rd (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Mining engineer; of Melbourne, Vic.; b Largs Bay, S. Aust., 13 March, 1890. Killed in action, 6 Nov., 1917. (Son of Rear-Adm. Sir William R. Creswell, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., First Naval Member of Royal Aust. Naval Board.)

however, that Chauvel was now able in a telephone conversation with Chetwode to assure him that there was no further doubt as to the issue.

The significance of the achievement of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment and the Camels was immediately demonstrated. The prisoners in the redoubt numbered three officers and ninety-two other ranks. Fulton, exploiting his success, rushed up two of his machine-guns to the position, and these opened a galling fire on the next Turkish redoubt across the main wady on the right, towards which the advance was at once continued by the light horse and the Camels. Further to the left the 2nd Camel Battalion made touch with the New Zealanders, who, together with the 8th and 9th Light Horse Regiments of the 3rd Brigade, were now gaining ground on a wide frontage.

The Turks were at the same time being seriously harassed on their rear. The 10th Light Horse Regiment, which Major Robertson had led round by the south to cut off the retreat up the wady and along the telegraph line further west, had been engaged for some hours in an isolated and exciting encounter. When Robertson, who had led the regiment with great dash, rode down on the wady at the gallop with his men shouting wildly close behind him, he cut across a column of 300 Turks retreating in disorder. Startled by the sudden appearance of the Western Australians, the enemy was thrown into confusion, and surrendered without any attempt at fighting. Among the prisoners was a senior officer of engineers, who shared the terror of his men at the sight of the dusty and unshaven horsemen. He informed Robertson—a Duntroon graduate, who looked very young for his rank—that he would only surrender his sword to the Australian officer in charge. Somewhat embarrassed, Robertson said that he was the leader. He was as dusty and disreputable-looking as his men, and the Turk handed over his weapon with the air of a man resigned to a violent death at the hands of savages.

After crossing the wady, Robertson swung north, completely enveloped the enemy's right flank, and closed his only outlet of escape. Under his most spirited leadership the squadrons then advanced on the rear of the Turkish redoubts

with such vigour that the garrisons were deceived as to their strength. The frequent ridges, broken with many little knobs and desert bushes, gave good cover to the horses; and the line went forward in a succession of mounted rushes, galloping from cover to cover, dismounting, engaging for a time in rapid fire, and then riding forward again. The machine and Lewis gunners, riding with the advanced troops, gave effective covering fire. At this time Major L. C. Timperley⁶ was severely wounded while leading his squadron.

The advance of the Western Australians was now going with great vim, and all ranks were excited and above themselves with confidence. Lieutenants F. W. Cox⁷ and A. U. Martin,⁸ who were leading their troops on the left of the line, encountered a substantial Turkish redoubt on their immediate front, occupied by between 300 and 400 men. Though the Australians did not number more than between thirty and forty, they galloped straight on the position. They offered only a scattered and galloping target, but the Turks hit several horses and men before they reached the trenches. Despite the punishment, the light horsemen maintained their charge, and scrambled over the earthworks. To dismount meant certain annihilation; Cox and Martin therefore galloped straight on under heavy fire, leaving the redoubt unreduced. As they rode away from the trenches, Martin's horse was killed, and the young officer was shaken and dazed by the fall. Cox spurred on with his men to the cover of a ridge; then, accompanied by Sergeant Spencer Gwynne,⁹ he gallantly rode back under intense fire, took Martin on his saddle and galloped with him to safety.

Royston, who, as usual, was riding about in the thick of the fight, attended only by his orderly, galloped up to a Turkish trench and was instantly covered by five enemy rifles. The old fighter excitedly raised his cane and, knowing no Turkish, shouted at the riflemen in Zulu; whereupon the Turks,

⁶ Maj. L. C. Timperley, 10th L.H. Regt. Commonwealth public servant; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Geraldton, W. Aust., 15 May, 1879.

⁷ Capt. F. W. Cox, M.C. 10th L.H. Regt. Licensed surveyor; of Kojonup and Katanning Districts, W. Aust.; b. South Woodford, Essex, Eng., 23 June, 1885.

⁸ Lieut. A. U. Martin, 10th L.H. Regt. Engineer and farmer; of Mount Barker, W. Aust.; b. Gawler, S. Aust., 2 July, 1883.

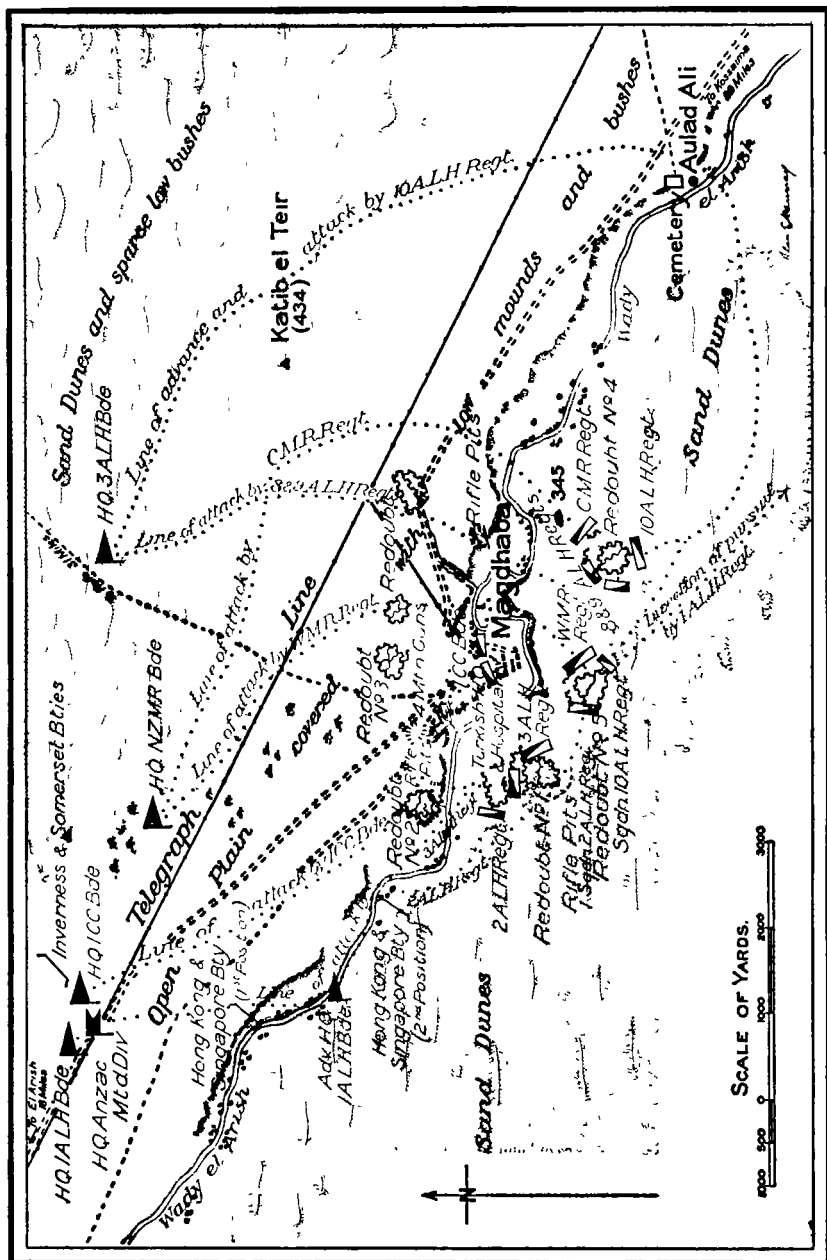
⁹ Lieut. S. Gwynne, D.C.M. 10th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Woodanilling, W. Aust.; b. Port Augusta, S. Aust.; 3 Sept., 1891.

impressed with the demonstration, dropped their rifles and held up their hands. The 10th Regiment captured in all 722 prisoners.

Equally bold and important in its bearing on the fight was the work done by a squadron of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment led by Major Birkbeck, which Cox had sent out with orders to cross the wady, ride wide to the west of the enemy, and menace the remaining redoubts from the rear. This squadron was not seen by the Turks until it appeared over a ridge directly behind them. With his little force in a scattered line, Birkbeck led a mounted dash at the redoubt previously ridden through by Cox and Martin, his men galloping over ground strewn with the dead and wounded men and horses of the 10th Regiment. The squadron, although severely punished by the Turkish rifles—finding itself, too, under fire from the New Zealanders and the 9th and 10th Regiments across the wady—maintained its charge and galloped into the redoubt. There the men, reining up their horses, began to shoot from their saddles. The Turks, demoralised by this second unexpected swoop from their rear, immediately broke; about 100 prisoners were taken, and the remainder, who fled towards the main wady, were secured later.

With the 1st Brigade and the Camels advancing strongly on the north and the New Zealanders and the 8th and 9th Light Horse Regiments closing swiftly from the east, the issue of the fight was now virtually decided. After the capture of No. 2 Redoubt, the 3rd Regiment and the Camels had made rapid progress towards No. 1 Redoubt. The rival forces were now everywhere fighting at close quarters, and Chauvel ordered his batteries to cease fire. The Turks at No. 1 Redoubt again refused to fight with the steel; about 4 o'clock, as the Australians approached with the bayonet, they surrendered, and, pressing on, the Australians soon had No. 3 Redoubt in their possession. Khadir Bey, the Turkish commander at Magdhaba, was captured in No. 1 Redoubt.

While the Wellingtons of the New Zealand Brigade had marched direct on Hill 345 by a line which would carry them through the buildings of the settlement, the Canterburys had swung to the left and made a wide *détour* across the front of the 8th and 9th Regiments, continuing until their left was



MAGHABA—POSITION AT DUSK ON 23RD DECEMBER, 1916.



MAGDARA THE ADVANCE OF THE 9TH AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT ON 23RD DECEMBER
1916.

*Taken by Lieut.-Col. W. H. Scott with L. H. Reat
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2809*



AUSTRALIANS MOUNTING THEIR CAMELS

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B195

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in touch with the 10th Regiment. Although the ground was as a whole exposed to the enemy fire, good shelter for the advancing riflemen was given by the large ant-hills and many bushes, and casualties were slight. But progress was very slow, and by 1 o'clock neither regiment was within striking distance of the enemy. At this hour Chaytor ordered the 8th and 9th Light Horse Regiments to strike in between the Wellingtons and the Canterburys.

Dismounting about a mile and a half from the Turks, the two Australian regiments advanced quickly over the first 1,000 yards. As the opposition of the enemy rifles grew strong, each squadron moved by troops in bounds of from twenty-five to fifty yards, with the Lewis gunners always forward and doing excellent work in keeping down Turkish fire. When the front line was within 500 yards of the enemy trenches, the squadrons were halted and additional ammunition brought up. This was the first engagement in which the men carried two bandoliers, and the innovation added so much to the fire-strength of the regiments that it was adopted during the remainder of the campaign. Soon after 3 o'clock the line resumed its advance by troops successively, and the 8th Light Horse Regiment, always singularly unlucky, suffered many casualties at this stage. Captain M. B. Higgins¹⁰ and Lieutenants E. H. Mack¹¹ and E. G. Down¹² were killed as they led their men, and Lieutenant J. T. Currie¹³ was wounded; only ten men of other ranks were killed or wounded—a graphic comment upon the bold leadership by junior officers. With the Wellingtons on their right, the two Australian regiments fixed bayonets about eighty yards from the enemy trenches, and then charged right home. For a few minutes the Turks engaged fiercely in a hand to hand encounter, and several of their men were killed with the bayonet before the general surrender. The Australians then covered with their fire the advance of the Wellingtons, and, as the New Zealanders advanced to close quarters, the Turks

¹⁰ Capt. M. B. Higgins, Adjutant 8th L.H. Regt. 1916. Barrister-at-law; of Malvern, Melb., and Dromana, Vic.; b. Malvern, 8 Nov., 1887. Killed in action, 23 Dec., 1916.

¹¹ Lieut. E. H. Mack, 8th L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Berrybank, Camperdown, Vic., 5 March, 1886. Died of wounds, 23 Dec., 1916.

¹² Lieut. E. G. Down, 8th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Shepparton and Mooropna, Vic.; b. Camperdown, Vic., 9 June, 1885. Killed in action, 23 Dec., 1916.

¹³ Lieut. J. T. Currie, 8th L.H. Regt. Clerk; of Prahran, Melbourne, Vic.; b. Prahran, 5 Dec., 1887.

in front of them raised the white flag. The 8th Light Horse Regiment, which had encountered the stiffest of the opposition, pressed on and captured a second position, taking in all 250 prisoners.

At a few minutes past 4 o'clock all the redoubts had fallen. Isolated enemy parties about the wady continued to resist for a little longer; but by 4.30, as the short winter day was closing, the last shot had been fired, and Chauvel's victorious troops, converging from the complete circle about the settlement, met in the falling darkness. In the last general charge the units had overlapped and mingled, and for two or three hours in the night the scene was one of great animation and confusion; regiments were re-assembled, horses brought up, watering effected as far as possible at the crowded wells, and prisoners collected. The competition for prisoners between the different regiments was, as usual, very keen. The French military attaché, Captain Count St. Quentin, while wandering about looking at the Turks, was seized by a light horseman, and, despite his excited protests, bundled in with the captives. All foreigners were alike to the excited light horsemen. As the men lit their cigarettes and pipes, the matches gave brief peeps of Australian troopers, very gay despite their weariness; of silent, sullen Turks; of fretful, thirsty horses; of great, stolid camels, never in the least concerned at the din and clamour of battle; while out on the surrounding country scores of little fires marked the position of the wounded, and guided the tireless bearers to their relief.

The batteries, whose orders were to march immediately after the action, reached El Arish about midnight. Granville, of the 1st Light Horse Regiment, was left with a few squadrons to clear the battleground; and half-an-hour before midnight Chauvel, with his headquarters and the 1st Brigade, commenced the long ride back to El Arish, followed by the rest of the force. Chetwode had ordered camel convoys forward to meet the column with water and rations. Part of the force halted and were refreshed on the route, while others rode right through and reached the camp near the coast about an hour before dawn. This was the third, and with many of the regiments the fourth, night without rest, and there were very few officers or men who did not sleep as they rode.

Scarcely any Turks escaped from Magdhaba. Granville's men buried ninety-seven of their dead, and their wounded were estimated at about 300, while 1,282 were made prisoners. Four mountain guns, 1,250 rifles, and 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition were seized, as well as a considerable number of horses and camels. Chauvel's casualties were: officers, 5 killed and 7 wounded; other ranks, 17 killed and 117 wounded.

Extreme suffering was inflicted upon the wounded in the course of transport over the twenty-two miles to El Arish. The broken nature of the ground made the process of collection slow; it was not until the afternoon of the day following the engagement that Major C. E. Hercus,¹⁴ a gifted young New Zealander, who was in charge of the ambulance, was satisfied that the area had been thoroughly searched and all men accounted for. With the wounded men on camel cacolets, the ambulance then marched out from Magdhaba. A hideous night followed, as the long column of 150 camels, each bearing its burden of two jolted, groaning men, moved slowly through the intense darkness. The dust was stifling, and the cold extreme. The cacolets frequently became unbalanced, and at each breakdown the whole column was held up. This was the fourth successive night on which officers and men of the ambulance had been without sleep; but all ranks worked cheerfully, as they did on every occasion throughout the campaign, in their endeavours to relieve the agony of the shattered men. Three men died on the camels.

At El Arish the wounded were lifted down and rested. But they were still thirty miles from railhead, and unfortunately the arrangements made by the higher staffs were, as at Romani, indefinite and unsatisfactory. The medical officers of the Anzac Mounted Division had already packed the men on to the comfortable sand-carts for the long journey to the railway when orders were received to evacuate them by sea. A strong and bitterly cold wind, with a heavy sea, was beating in from the Mediterranean. The men had to be unloaded from the sand-carts, and suffered unnecessarily from exposure until December 28th, five days after the fight,

¹⁴ Lieut.-Col. C. E. Hercus, D.S.O., O.B.E. N.Z. Medical Corps. Of Christchurch, N.Z.; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 13 June, 1888.

when the orders as to sea-transport were cancelled, and they were permitted to proceed by land as originally arranged. Consequently, from seven to nine days elapsed between the fight and their arrival at hospital. Neither the experience of a hundred campaigns, nor the impulsive sympathy of ordinary men towards human suffering, nor, apparently, the ease with which simple and effective arrangements could be made, seem able to move a British army staff to give to the wounded in the field—especially if operations are far removed from the influence of public opinion—that treatment which in times of peace is given by civilians to the most despised of dumb animals. In the fighting on Sinai the British wounded had more to fear from faulty arrangements for their transport than from the cowardly Bedouin of the desert.

The unqualified success at Magdhaba supplies a classical example of the right use of mounted riflemen. In scarcely more than twenty-four hours the light horsemen, New Zealanders, and Camels had ridden upwards of fifty miles, had fought, mounted and dismounted, twenty-three miles from their water-supply and fifty miles from railhead, and had surprised and annihilated a strongly placed enemy. The engagement brought out all the effective qualities of the light horsemen: the excellent discipline of the silent night-ride, the rapid approach before dismounting, the dashing leadership of the junior officers, the cleverness of the men, while maintaining their advance, in taking advantage of all cover, the effective use of machine-guns and Lewis guns, and the eagerness of the troopers for bayonet work as they got to close quarters. Chauvel's leadership was distinguished by the rapidity with which he summed up the very obscure Turkish position in the early morning, and by his judgment and characteristic patience in keeping so much of his force in reserve until the fight developed sufficiently to ensure its most profitable employment.

CHAPTER XV

RAFA

WHILE Magdhaba was being fought by the mounted troops, and during the fortnight which followed, Sir Philip Chetwode took energetic steps to make the occupation of El Arish secure against any counter-stroke which might be attempted by the enemy. Sir Archibald Murray estimated that the enemy might have 50,000 men available for an assault on the head of his column. The British force at El Arish was now in a similar position to that in which the Turks had found themselves when they advanced in July to the Katia oasis. Between El Arish and railhead there was a stretch of thirty miles of heavy sand almost devoid of wells; while now the Turks, if they chose to attack, had a sound watered route to advance over. As the brigades of the 52nd Infantry Division came out of the desert, they at once set to work to ensure the new position with entrenchments.

On the morning of December 22nd ships of the British Navy had appeared off El Arish—a very welcome sight to the light horsemen—and at once began cleaning up the enemy mine-fields. By the morning of the 24th stores were being landed on the beach and on a pier which had been constructed by the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train. From the beginning of the Sinai campaign, when the pilots of the Royal Naval Air Service, taking flight from their mother ship the *Ben Machree* in the Mediterranean, had been Murray's only air force, till the termination of Allenby's victorious march to the Taurus Mountains, the British Navy gave material assistance to the troops ashore. Its monitors, which had made possible the feint of a landing at Cyprus, had bombarded the Turks during the Battle of Romani; at El Arish it began to play an invaluable part in the operations by the transport of supplies to the advancing army. From this time on, as the long fighting march was continued, and the land forces, preceded by their mounted troops, entered port after port along the enemy's coast, the soldiers were cheered on the morning following each conquest by the sight of significant grey ships stealing in to greet and ration them from the sea.

Cold winds and rainstorms attended the last week of the year, and the Christmas season was passed by the light horse brigades in active preparation for further operations. The harsh desert life had sharpened the men's appreciation of the simplest luxuries, and the distribution of gifts to them by the representatives of the Australian Comforts Fund had a heartening effect which probably exceeded the fondest hopes of the Australian donors. Some of the regiments had received their "Christmas billies" on the eve of the march to Magdhaba, and the troopers had attached them to their saddles to supplement the limited rations. As they had advanced at the gallop before dismounting for action, many of the billies worked loose, and Christmas puddings, tins of milk, packets of chocolates, and similar dainties were strewn thickly over the approach to the battle-ground.

On the 27th General Murray, whose visits to the front were not frequent, and who was unknown by sight to most of his men, came to Chetwode's advanced-headquarters at El Arish. After consultation, it was decided to press the advance as rapidly as possible along the coast, and so by indirect pressure compel the Turks to retire from the Sinai highlands. As a preliminary step it was resolved to raid the Turkish force in position at El Magruntein, close to the old Egyptian police post at Rafa. Aeroplane reconnaissance and photographs enabled accurate sketches to be prepared of the enemy's defences; and on the evening of January 8th, Chauvel marched out with the 1st and 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigades, Chaytor's New Zealand Brigade, and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions of the Camel Brigade. Chetwode, who decided to supervise in person the conduct of the fight, moved with the column, and kept the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade under his own direct control. This brigade, with Australian officers from the 1st Light Horse Brigade as guides, led the column as far as the native village of Sheikh Zowaid, which was reached shortly before midnight and swiftly enveloped to prevent the Arabs from warning the Turks at Rafa. The New Zealanders then headed the night advance upon the Turkish position.

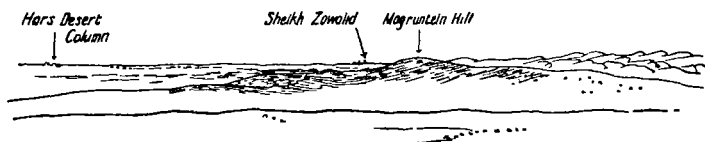
Although the light horsemen had already felt, when they reached the Wady el Arish, that Sinai was behind them, it

was on this ride to Rafa, after passing Sheikh Zowaiid, that they really cleared the outskirts of the desert and found themselves upon the pleasant rolling country of southern Palestine. The Negib, or south land, is fertile only by contrast with the harsh uplands of Judæa to the north and the sandy wastes of Sinai to the south. Its undulating, treeless surface contains about 1,200 square miles lying roughly between the Wady Ghuzze and the desert fringe of Sinai. The soil is light, and becomes more fertile towards the north; but, thanks to the phenomenal regularity of the winter rains, it is, so far as its limited capacity permits, one of the most dependable pastoral and agricultural regions in the world. Unfailingly in November the thirsty sun-dried land is refreshed with a downpour sufficient to start the native grasses, and to let the natives proceed with their crude cultivation and the sowing of the early crops. Then for about six weeks the country is blessed with ideally tranquil days of sunshine, and the land is clothed with swiftly-springing crops and pastures and a great glory of delicate wild flowers. About the end of the year, usually in the week of Christmas, the main wet season commences, and heavy rains fall frequently until about the beginning of March. There are diminishing showers during March and April; then comes the dry season, and up till November rain is rarely known.

As Chetwode's force on the evening of the 8th advanced from El Arish to Sheikh Zowaiid, a distance of about fifteen miles, the sky was clear and the air sharp. British and Australian aeroplanes patrolling to the east had kept enemy aircraft at a distance, so that both the concentration and the march were concealed from the Turks. Chauvel, with Anzac Mounted Division and the Camel Brigade, cleared Sheikh Zowaiid at 1 o'clock in the morning of the 9th to ride the remaining ten miles to Magruntein (which lies about a mile to the south of Rafa) before dawn. Before reaching the scene of operations a considerable Bedouin encampment, believed to be hostile, was rushed by the New Zealanders in accordance with orders, and thirty armed Bedouins were speedily made prisoners without interrupting the progress of the column. The New Zealanders, working wide of Magruntein on the south, were by daylight in position to the east of Palestine

side of the Turks. The cordon was swiftly drawn, with the 1st Brigade on the left of the New Zealanders, so as to attack from the east; then the 3rd Light Horse Brigade with the Camels on their left to attack from the east and south, and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade ready to complete the gap between the Camels and the New Zealanders' right.

Dawn had disclosed a new and gracious world to Chauvel's men. When darkness fell on the evening of the 8th, they were still riding over a land of desert sands, a land less harsh to the eye and firmer under foot than the desert of Sinai, but still destitute of vegetation. But, as the night wore on, the horses were hungrily reaching for the first green grass they had eaten since leaving the Delta of the Nile; and at daylight the troopers looked round on a rolling expanse of tender pasture splashed with patches of young barley, and sprinkled brilliantly with poppies, anemones, iris, and a wealth of other wild flowers. Jaded as they were after the night in the saddle, all ranks were intoxicated with delight, and only vigorous riding prevented the desert-worn walers from halting to graze.



The battlefield of Rafa from N.Z.M.R. Brigade Headquarters.

Seldom since long-range weapons came into use has a prospective battleground been disclosed in such clear detail to an attacking force. The enemy occupied a bare, irregular knob with its slopes running gradually down for about a mile to the level of the surrounding plain on the east, west, south, and to the foot of the coastal sand-dunes on the north. The position had its summit in Hill 255 on the eastern side; to the south-east of that was another knob almost as high, marked by a solitary large tree. Except for this tree, scattered patches of early barley about nine inches high, and the tender winter grasses and wild flowers, the area was naked of vegetation or cover.



AMBULANCES OF THE ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION MOVING ALONG THE
BEACH NEAR EL ARISH

*Taken by Cpl T. Hanly, 3rd L.H. Fld. Amb.
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2487.*



ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY IN ACTION AT RAFA, 9TH JANUARY, 1917

*Taken by Lieut-Col W. H. Scott, 9th L.H. Regt.
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2837*

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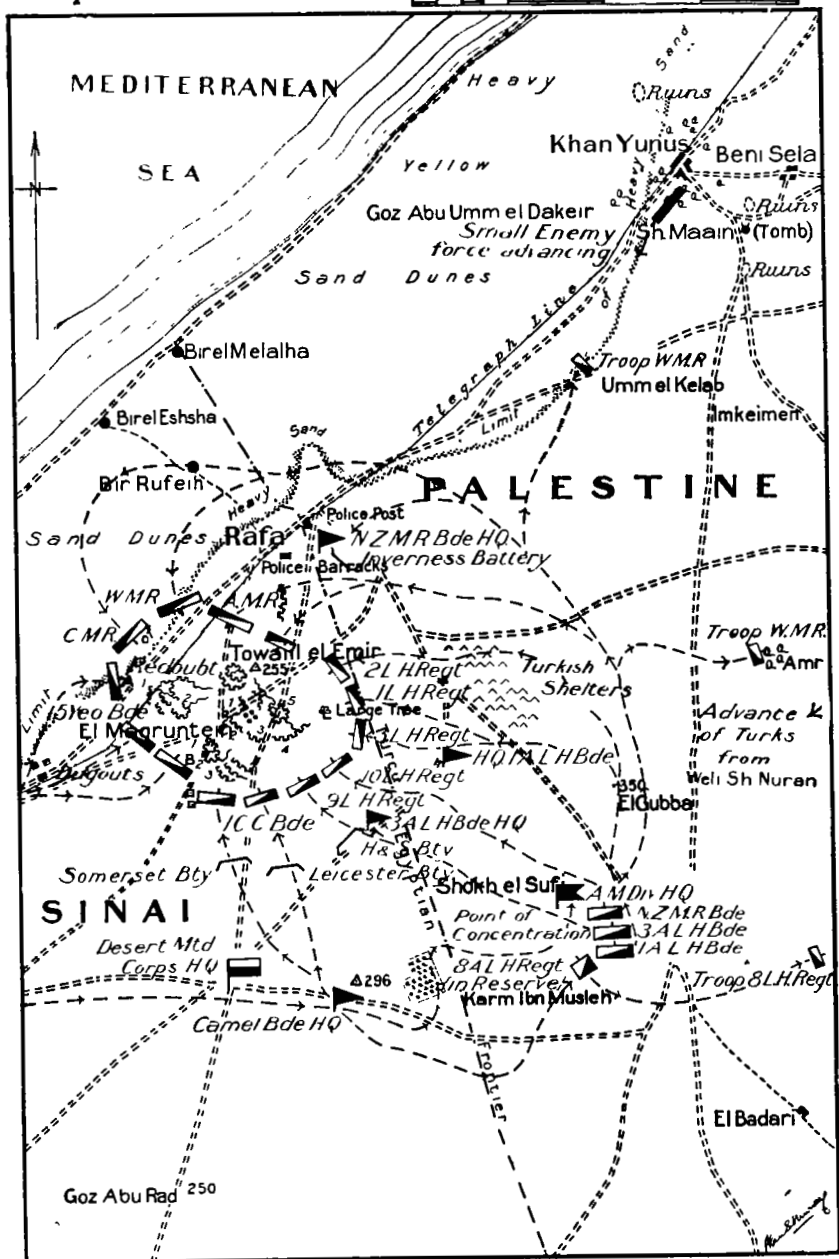
VIEW OF GAZA FROM THE SUMMIT OF ALI EL MUNTAR

4481 H a) Museum Official Photo No B969

Map No. 10

SCALE OF YARDS

1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000



BATTLE OF RAFA.

As the light became clear, the Turks discovered the long columns of horse and Camels moving rapidly to perfect the envelopment; the confusion which followed confessed their surprise. There was an immediate and disorderly rush of troops to their numerous earthworks, so that the light horsemen had a full view of their preparations for battle. But the discomfiture was not altogether one-sided. From the air-photographs Chauvel had prepared for a strongly defended position more or less in the open. But neither he nor Chetwode had expected a task so discouraging as that now disclosed to them. "When daylight broke," said Chetwode in his subsequent despatch to Dobell, "the ground was seen to be almost entirely open and devoid of cover, while the immediate neighbourhood of the works was almost a glacia. I confess I thought the task was almost beyond the capacity of dismounted cavalry to carry through."

To the south and east of the position, and between Chauvel's brigades and the enemy, was a large scattered Bedouin encampment, whose people had been engaged in trade with the garrison and also in the cultivation of the surrounding country. These degenerate gypsy children of the great tribes of old would seem to have inherited a consciousness of all the armed hosts which for thousands of years have marched and fought upon their ancient countryside. They were indifferent alike to the sudden coming of strange troops, and to modern weapons and vehicles of war. Men and women at work in the fields would seldom trouble to cease their labours to look at the advance-guard of the British army, breaking for the first time into their district. During the engagement at Rafa some of the men continued to follow their crude ploughs on land between Chauvel's batteries and the Turkish trenches. Possibly, however, this indifference was studied and deliberate, for no sooner had each engagement ceased, than they swarmed like carrion-crows over the battleground.

By 7 o'clock the enemy garrison had been isolated by the cutting of the wires leading to Khan Yunis and Shellal. Twenty minutes later, as the brigades were completing their arrangements, the Royal Horse Artillery and the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery began registering their ranges for the

bombardment preliminary to the attack, which was timed for 10 o'clock. The Turkish defences consisted of three groups of earthworks, A, B, and C, and a large strong redoubt on Hill 255, the whole making a rough square with one of its corners to the north.

255
A C
 B

Most of these earthworks were plainly visible to Chauvel's horsemen, as from their position out on the plain they waited for the order to advance, and the gunners as they opened fire had the rare satisfaction of laying on to their targets over open sights. At 10 o'clock the New Zealanders rode forward from the east, with the works C4 and C5 as their objective. Simultaneously the 1st Light Horse Brigade, also mounted, advanced from the east and south-east and closed towards the works C1, C2, and C3; while the men of the Camel Brigade, obliged as usual to leave their camels further back, marched on foot against the B earthworks from the south.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was temporarily held by Chauvel in reserve, nor did Chetwode at once commit the Yeomanry Brigade. A stimulating preliminary success was gained almost immediately by the New Zealanders. Soon after 10 o'clock parties of Turks endeavoured to escape from the main position by the track to Khan Yunis; the Canterbury Regiment with an enthusiastic dash galloped down upon them at the Rafa Police Post, and, continuing its rush, rode over a machine-gun emplacement 300 yards to the west. The Turks, demoralised by the yelling horsemen, surrendered without a fight, and six Germans and two Turkish officers and 163 other ranks were captured. This gallop also gave the Canterburys possession of a line of half-completed enemy works running from Rafa towards the south-east. At the same time the Auckland Regiment pressed in on the left of the Canterburys, while the Wellingtons on the right cleared the sand-hills between the enemy and the sea. The New Zealand Brigade as a whole then began slowly to close on the entrapped garrison. For some time the line steadily made

progress against shrapnel, machine-gun, and rifle fire from the vigilant, well-placed enemy.

Very early in the fight the two reserve brigades (3rd Light Horse and Yeomanry) were thrown in, and by 11 o'clock all were engaged. The 1st Light Horse Brigade, on the left of the New Zealanders, was diverted somewhat to the right against works C4 and C5, in their endeavour to keep touch with the New Zealanders. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade advanced against C3 and C4 on the left of the 1st, while the Yeomanry Brigade was ordered to deploy against B1 and B2 on the left of the Camels. As the dismounted attack became general, with the successive waves of riflemen still about 1,000 yards from the enemy trenches, the seriousness of the British task was vividly disclosed. The circle was yet far too wide for contact; each brigade was more or less isolated, with its flanks exposed; and the admirable placing of the enemy posts left most of the British troops open to enfilade fire. For a time the Turks shrewdly withheld their fire, and all the regiments made rapid progress until they came within about half-a-mile of the earthworks. Then the Turks opened vigorously with all arms, and Chauvel's men, still beyond charging distance, were held by a hail of lead which each moment increased in intensity and deadliness. From time to time the horse artillery was advanced at the gallop to fresh positions, while the Indians of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery gallantly man-handled their guns forward. All day the gunners shot with fine precision at the exposed targets; but, although they harassed the enemy riflemen, the material effect of their light weapons upon the earthworks was insignificant.

The extreme caution displayed at most stages of these dismounted attacks, and the relatively light casualties usually suffered, may be somewhat puzzling to those who have served only with infantry. But the explanation is simple. A light horse line is a slender striking force, and leaders dare not commit it to a decisive charge unless the odds of battle are strongly in its favour. A premature assault against a strongly placed enemy, as at Rafa or Magdhaba, might in a few minutes have ended in the complete destruction of the attacking regiments.

Cox had commenced his advance with the 1st Light Horse Brigade by marching the 1st Regiment under Granville against works C1, C2, and C3. With about 2,000 yards to cross after leaving their horses, the regiments made good headway until the men reached the sunken road about 800 yards east of C4—towards which, as we have seen, they had been drawn in their efforts to keep touch with the New Zealanders on their right. At 11 o'clock the 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Regiments were sent in on either side of the 1st. Cox's sector was particularly exposed, especially on its left, where the 3rd Regiment suffered severely. The three regiments pressed on slowly by troop and squadron rushes, until the 10th Light Horse Regiment of the 3rd Brigade made contact with the 3rd Regiment under Colonel Fulton, when the pace was stimulated, and in places the advance was carried to within 400 yards of the enemy's defences. Between 1 and 2 o'clock the 1st Regiment rushed a small outlying trench, killed several Turks, and took twenty-four prisoners. Here Major T. E. W. W. Irwin¹ and thirteen men were wounded and one man was killed. At about the same time the 2nd also overran an enemy post and secured twenty prisoners. But the Turkish redoubts constantly enfiladed the Australians, and soon the 1st Brigade was definitely arrested. Orders were given to dig in, but the men had only their bayonets and the ground was hard, so that this work was slow and the cover gained but slight. For more than three hours the regiments held their position, with the exception of a slight retirement which Cox decided upon for the 3rd, and which was carried out in perfect order. The strength and confidence of the Turks at this time were shown by their endeavour to exploit what they perhaps took to be the beginning of the general British retirement. As the 3rd Regiment fell back, the Turkish riflemen stood up and opened rapid fire. But they were at once observed, not only by the 1st and 2nd Regiments, but also by the 9th and 10th on the left, and were promptly forced down by the good shooting of riflemen and Lewis gunners.

The experience of the 9th and 10th Regiments of the

¹ Maj T. E. W. W. Irwin. Commanded 1st L.H. Regt. (temply. Lieut.-Col.), Oct., 1918. Farmer; b. Bega, N.S.W., 13 Feb., 1881.

3rd Light Horse Brigade, and the 1st Battalion of Camels under Langley, was similar to that of the 1st Brigade. Langley led the 1st Battalion under cover of a ridge until he was within 700 yards of the "B" group of defences. The 15th Company (New Zealand), which was that day attached to the 1st Battalion, and was led by Captain J. G. McCallum,² formed the firing line. Attempting to cross the ridge, McCallum's men were caught by a withering enfilade fire from the "C" works on his right, and McCallum fell mortally wounded. Lieutenant H. A. J. Linford³ was killed at about this time. Pending developments in the other sectors, Langley was ordered to halt behind the crest, where his battalion was without a target, and for about four hours remained out of action. At 2 o'clock the left flank of the 5th Mounted Brigade joined up with the right of the New Zealanders, and the circle was complete. But it was practically stationary; and, with only a few hours' daylight remaining, the outlook was liked neither by Chetwode, whose headquarters were four and a half miles away, nor by Chauvel, who from an elevated position to the south had a clear view of the operations. General Royston, of the 3rd Brigade, at about this stage impulsively galloped right round the whole position, but saw no such opportunity as he had seized so effectively with the 10th Light Horse at Magdhaba.

At no stage in the advance were the brigades able to establish sustained superiority of fire. When the several regiments were halted, they could, with their rifles and machine-guns, supported by the batteries, keep the enemy fairly quiet; but immediately the pressure was taken off to enable the squadrons to advance in succession, the Turks stood boldly up above their parapets and re-asserted their mastery. Moreover, the munition reserves had been left at Sheikh Zowaiid, ten miles away, and were slow in coming forward. As a consequence the New Zealand Brigade had four machine-guns out of action in the early afternoon; and soon after 3 o'clock the Inverness Battery, which was attached to that brigade,

² Capt J. G. McCallum, 4th (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Solicitor; of Christchurch, N.Z.; b. Halkett, Canterbury, N.Z., 24 Feb., 1890. Died of wounds, 11 Jan., 1917.

³ Lieut H. A. J. Linford, 1st (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Police constable, b. Uxbridge, Middlesex, Eng., 13 Nov., 1882. Killed in action, 9 Jan., 1917.

fired its last shell and was sent back to divisional headquarters. Chetwode at no stage contemplated an expensive fight to a finish. The Turks at Rafa numbered only about 2,000, and, even if they were not overthrown, it was practically certain that they would speedily retire further east. The British had all or nearly all their mounted troops engaged, and, with the prospect of an early general advance into southern Palestine, heavy losses among the horsemen could not be afforded at that stage.

The Turks and the assaulting circle therefore settled down at short range to a prolonged duel of small arms. Even lying flat as they were, the British were clearly visible to the enemy on the higher ground. Intensive fire was maintained to keep the Turks off their parapets, and the machine and Lewis gunners, working right forward with little or no cover, ceaselessly skimmed earthworks, and were of incalculable value. Casualties were kept remarkably low, although the heroic stretcher-bearers, moving fearlessly in the open, were a constant target, and two squadron leaders of the 3rd Regiment, Major C. Mills⁴ and Major L. A. Lewis,⁵ were wounded as they walked about cheering their lines. Happily the mountain guns of the enemy were compelled to extend their activities all round the menacing circle, and in consequence their fire was never concentrated and seldom accurate. As at Magdhaba, it was a stern fight against the approaching darkness, with Chauvel and Chetwode seeking complete victory at the lowest possible cost. And, as at Magdhaba, Chauvel knew that the capture of one strong earthwork in the enemy system would give him the key to the whole situation. He therefore waited with his usual patience, while his regiments crouched within attacking distance, alert for the opportunity to spring.

General Smith, of the Camel Brigade, recognising that progress was for the time impossible on the sector allotted to him, decided early in the afternoon to extend his line to the left and engage "B" group of works from the south-west. Major Bassett undertook these operations with two companies of the 2nd (British) Battalion. Acting on a suggestion

⁴ Lieut.-Col. C. Mills, V.D., 3rd L.H. Regt. Pastoralist; of Longford, Tas.; b. Charters Towers, Q'land, 4 Dec., 1877.

⁵ Maj. L. A. Lewis, 3rd L.H. Regt. Pastoral inspector, b. Burra, S. Aust., 25 Sept., 1885.

from Langley, Smith then ordered Major H. J. Huddleston,⁶ with two companies of the 3rd (Australian) Battalion and one company of the 2nd (British) Battalion, to work round on the west, between Bassett's men and the yeomanry, with a view to an assault with the bayonet against B1, the main redoubt of that system. The movement was promptly effected, and Huddleston, an Imperial officer and a heavy giant of a man, made ready for the charge, while the Hong Kong and Singapore guns, man-handled forward by the Indians under heavy fire, came into action against B1 at a range of only 1,500 yards, and immediately reduced its volume of machine-gun and rifle fire. At almost the same moment the Camels received from Huddleston the preliminary order to "charge on the whistle," the New Zealanders on the other side of the battleground were being pulled together by their officers for a similar charge against the main redoubt on Hill 255.

As at Magdhaba, victory was almost thrown away by a premature order for a general withdrawal. A detachment of the 8th Light Horse Regiment under Lieutenant L. A. W. Macpherson,⁷ and parties of the Wellingtons had been sent to watch the country to the east and north-east for enemy reinforcements from Khan Yunis and Shellal. Shortly before 4 o'clock a force estimated at two battalions was observed four miles west of Shellal moving from Weli Sheikh Nuran on the rear of the Anzac Mounted Division, and half-an-hour later the patrols towards Khan Yunis reported another body about 500 strong advancing from the north-east. These reports were endorsed by the British airmen, who, however, estimated the Turkish reinforcements at 2,500. At that time Chetwode's attacking troops were everywhere at a standstill; his last reserves were committed, and the enemy was coming up rapidly behind Cox's brigade and the New Zealanders. Chetwode, therefore, after discussing the situation with Chauvel by telephone, decided at 4.25 to break off the fight and withdraw. The 5th Mounted Brigade was at once pulled out; and Chetwode.

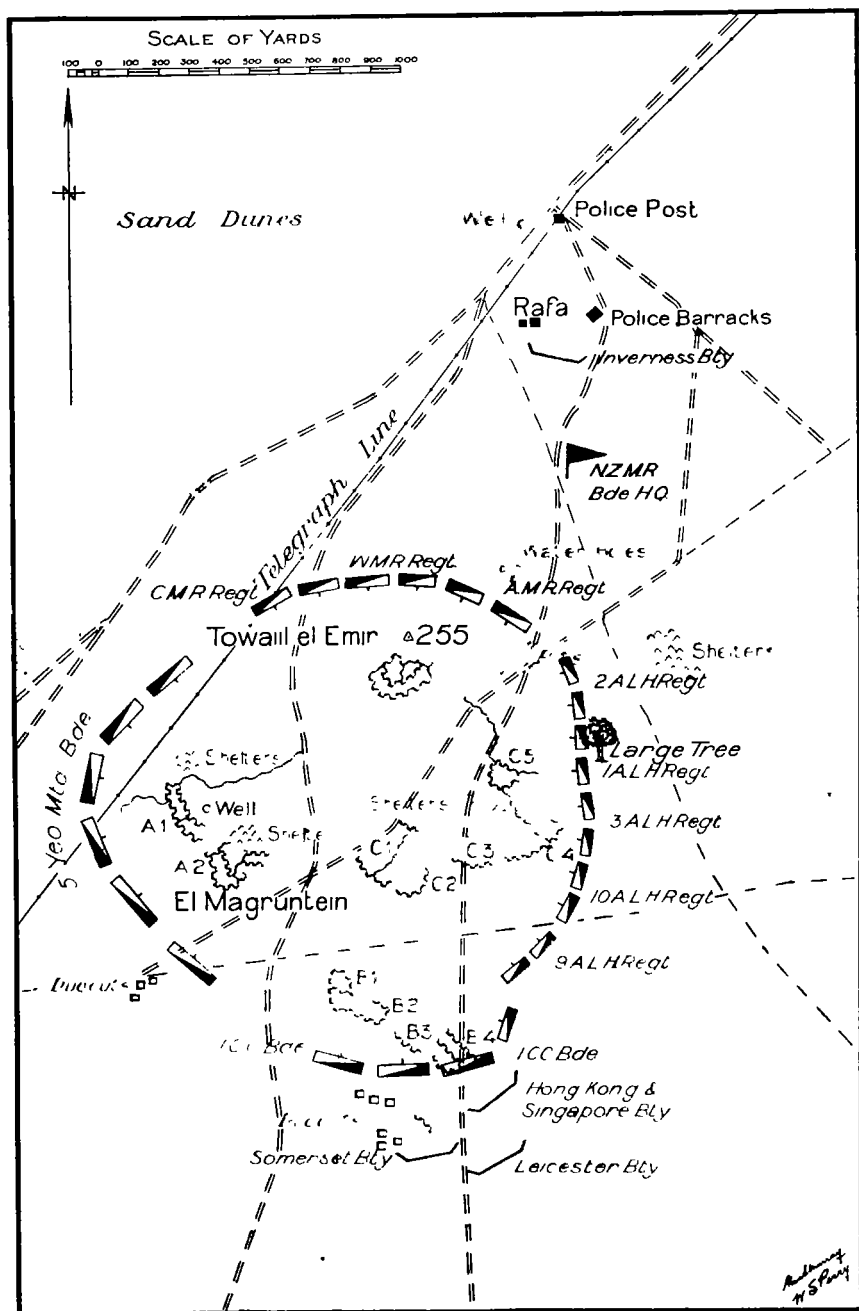
⁶ Maj.-Gen H. J. Huddleston, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C. Commanded 232nd Inf. Bde., 1917/19. Officer of British Regular Army, of Norton, West Suffolk, Eng.; b. Thurston, West Suffolk, 20 Jan., 1880.

⁷ Maj. L. A. W. Macpherson, D.S.O., M.C. 8th L.H. Regt. Station manager; of Willia Ploma Station, Gundagai, N.S.W.; b. Goulburn, N.S.W., 15 Apr., 1884.

accepting failure, mounted his horse and began his ride back to El Arish. At the same time the order to withdraw was issued to the brigades of Anzac Mounted Division.

But the order, although received by some of the brigades, fell on regardless ears, for at that moment both the men of the Camels and the New Zealanders were out in the open with fixed bayonets in a prolonged uphill charge for the Turkish trenches. It is impossible to distinguish between the merit of these two superb advances. Chaytor had received direct intelligence of the approach of the enemy's relief force, and decided in the brief time remaining to bring the struggle to a test with the steel. Redoubt 255, on which the brigade was to march, stood out clearly nearly a mile away from the New Zealand line, on the crest of an absolutely naked grassy slope. All officers recognised that they were engaged in a contest against time; they led their men up the hill at a great pace, but still did not find it easy to keep in advance of the eager troopers. It was a wild tempestuous rush rather than a steady and precise advance of the kind in which British regular infantry so often excels. As the men went forward, heavy rifle and machine-gun fire was concentrated on the redoubt, until (in the words of the brigade report) it was "smoking like a furnace." But despite the hail of lead the Turks, resisting with fine courage, could be seen standing up to take aim with their rifles. As usual, however, when the Ottoman was flurried, his shooting was poor, and the New Zealand casualties were extremely light. When about 800 yards from the position the line was consolidated. The New Zealanders then charged up the slope in two grand rushes, and leaped yelling at the trenches. The Turks, menaced with the bayonet, made only a feeble resistance before they surrendered. Their casualties had been heavy. The trenches were strewn with dead and wounded, in some places two and three deep. The New Zealand Brigade in the whole day's operations had only seventeen men killed, and nine officers and eighty-four men of other ranks wounded.

While the New Zealanders on the north were sweeping irresistibly up the long rise to 255, Major Huddleston, on the south, closely followed by the impetuous Camels and supported by fire from the machine-guns, was charging in an equally



RAFA—ATTACK BY N.Z.M.R. BRIGADE AND I.C.C. BRIGADE.

bold fashion up the bare slope leading to the work B4. In the first rush Captain G. A. Smith,⁸ of the 12th Company (Australian), was killed at the head of his men. The line went on with gathering speed against heavy fire, although, as the Camels closed, the enemy shooting became erratic and ineffective. When 200 yards away Huddleston's men could plainly see the Turks fixing their bayonets; accepting the challenge with a great roar, they rushed at the stronghold. But as they reached the trenches the Turks raised a number of white flags, and a moment later the panting assailants, who were almost too exhausted after their long charge for further effort, were shaking hands with the enemy all along the line. Many times during the campaign there were similar examples of this instinctive incapacity of the Anzacs to sustain their battle-fury for a moment after the fight was won; again and again, when the enemy had taken full advantage of his trenches, and continued shooting until the last possible second, he was spared as soon as he dropped his rifle. With all their zest for battle, the men from the two young Dominions were never bloody killers. Huddleston captured five Turkish officers and 219 unwounded men of other ranks, while his own losses were Captain Smith and nine men killed, and thirty-nine wounded.

The storming of these two earthworks was immediately followed by the collapse of the whole enemy resistance. The New Zealanders pushed on strongly towards other entrenchments, but the Turks in them surrendered; similarly, as Huddleston's men prepared for further advance, the enemy raised white flags. Cox's regiments of the 1st Brigade were quick to appreciate the significance of the determined advance of the New Zealanders. As soon as they were seen in the open, the three light horse regiments rose and dashed forward at the "C" group of earthworks, and the 10th and 9th Regiments on their left, who could see both the New Zealanders and the Camels, joined in the general assault. At the same time the 5th Yeomanry Brigade returned to participate in the closing stages of the struggle. The remaining redoubts were speedily overrun without serious opposition,

⁸ Capt. G. A. Smith, 3rd (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Bank accountant; of Narrabri, N S W.; b. Muswellbrook, N S W., 4 May, 1882. Killed in action, 9 Jan., 1917.

although scattered bursts of rifle fire continued until the fall of darkness. In view of the menace of enemy reinforcements from the east, it was decided immediately to evacuate the battleground, and the main force retired upon Sheikh Zowaid, where the brigades bivouacked for the night. The field ambulances of Anzac Mounted Division remained on the battleground, covered by two regiments of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel L. C. Maygar, V.C.,⁹ of the 8th Regiment. The Turkish reinforcements withdrew when they discovered the fall of the position, but early in the morning of the 10th a force of cavalry and camelry made a spirited but fruitless attack upon Maygar's two regiments.

All day the British and Australian airmen hovered over the fight, and for the first time on this front used wireless to direct the fire of the batteries. One of the observers was Lieutenant Ross Smith,¹⁰ who had fought at Romani in the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, and was now mastering the new service in which he was to have so remarkable a career.

The total British casualties at Rafa were 71 killed and 415 wounded. The enemy had 200 killed, and 168 wounded and 1,434 unwounded Turks were made prisoner. The trophies included four mountain guns and a number of machine-guns.

Nearly all the British wounded were carried off the battleground during the progress of the fight; sand-carts were provided for their transport, and arrangements for their treatment worked smoothly. On the fall of the position all possible relief was given to the wounded Turks, and the ambulance men were active all through the night. At dawn the Bedouins swarmed over the field; an hour later it had been stripped as clean of fighting material as the surrounding country. Uniforms and boots were torn savagely from the dead, and even from any of the Turkish wounded who still remained on the ground; afterwards it was found that even the graves had been opened by the wretched natives in their lust of gain. All through the campaign, British policy pandered foolishly

⁹ Lieut.-Col. L. C. Maygar, V.C., D.S.O., V.D., Commanded 8th L.H. Regt., 1915-17. Grazier, of Longwood and Euroa, Vic.; b. Dean Station, Kilmore, Vic., 26 May, 1872. Died of wounds, 1 Nov., 1917.

¹⁰ Capt. Sir Ross M. Smith, K.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., A.F.C. No. 1 Sqdn. Aust. Flying Corps. Warehouseman, b. Adelaide, S. Aust., 4 Dec., 1892. Killed in aeroplane accident, 14 Apr., 1922.

to these degenerate roaming Arabs of western Palestine. Firm punishment for gross offences at the outset would have saved infinite trouble later on and the loss of many good Australian and British lives by murder. But the Foreign Office, entirely ignorant of the quality of these people, insisted that the army leaders should treat them as respectable practising Moslems, kin to the Arabs of the Hejaz and of the same faith as the Moslems of the Indian Empire; and instructions were given that special care must be taken not to offend their susceptibilities. The Bedouins, who were almost entirely without either moral or religious principles of any kind whatever, readily took advantage of the situation. For more than two and a half years they continued to engage with impunity in thieving and more serious crimes against the British forces, and to bring false charges against the men to the sympathetic ears of British staff officers.

At Rafa the 7th Light Car Patrol, a British unit under Lieutenant W. H. P. McKenzie,¹¹ a young New Zealander, came into action for the first time on the front. The patrol, made up of six Ford motor-cars, each carrying a machine-gun, pushed boldly forward over the level ground in support of the Yeomanry Brigade, and its mobility and effective shooting gave promise of the remarkable work these units were to play as the campaign moved to the north. The 1st Australian Light Car Patrol was at this time engaged under Captain E. H. James¹² on the western desert, but was afterwards brought to Palestine. The two patrols which in reconnaissance and other operations often advanced considerably ahead of the mounted troops, and constantly engaged in sporting little fights against great odds, became heroes in the eyes of the Australians and New Zealanders. They were in the thick of many open fights, and also served the army in other capacities. After the fall of Rafa, McKenzie removed his guns and assisted in the transport of the wounded; they frequently succoured stranded airmen; later they became the favourite escort of General Allenby in his many advanced and thorough reconnaissances of enemy positions.

¹¹ Lieut. W. H. P. McKenzie, M.C. 100th Bn. Machine-Gun Corps. Student; of Otago, N.Z.; b. Pukerau, Southland, N.Z., 19 Dec., 1888.

¹² Capt. E. H. James, M.V.O., M.C., V.D., 1st Aust Light Car Patrol Engineer, of Hawthorn, Melb., Vic; b. Melbourne, 22 Nov., 1879

CHAPTER XVI

TOWARDS GAZA

THE Battle of Romani had changed the whole character of the campaign. The signal Turkish failure there had thrown the enemy at once upon the defensive, and in the two years which followed he did not rally again to a definite advance upon Egypt. Murray's movement across Sinai had, nevertheless, been of a progressive defensive nature rather than an ambitious aggression; and it was not until after the capture of El Arish and the sparkling little victories at Magdhaba and Rafa that the Commander-in-Chief ventured upon a concrete plan for the invasion of Palestine. His condition and immediate prospects at that time were calculated to awaken the ambition of any military leader. The railway was rapidly approaching El Arish, and, with supplies coming in from the sea, communications were highly satisfactory. The weather was cool, and four months were available for operations before the return of the summer; his troops were hard and fresh, and elated by the Magdhaba and Rafa victories; his infantry was rapidly increasing in numbers and would soon be four divisions strong, while a second division of mounted troops was in process of formation.

At last on the rolling plains of southern Palestine he had ground suitable for his infantry; it hitherto had been merely a force behind which the Anzac Mounted Division might find shelter in the event of the enemy attempting a dangerous counter-attack. At last, moreover, there was country on which wheels could move without sinking to their hubs. The cumbersome pedrails were stripped from the guns, the horse-teams were reduced from eight (and even ten) to six, and the artillery was promised its normal battle-activity. At the same time the "general service" waggons re-appeared, and enormously lightened the transport work of the divisions. The huge camel-trains, which during the Sinai advance were the only means of carrying supplies, had made the campaign possible, and had done all that could be expected of them. But at best camel-transport is exceedingly slow, and like a snow-

ball in its operation. It entails excessive handling of supplies, the feeding of thousands of camels and their drivers—which in themselves impose heavy additional work upon the railway—and the employment and maintenance of a further large number of animals and their attendants. Until the very end of the campaign at Aleppo camels were always extensively used, and were sometimes the sole means of transport; but wherever possible they were displaced by motor-lorries and horse-drawn waggons and limbers. In the ambulances the change to hard ground led to the abandonment of the sand-sleighs, and the use of motors and horse-vehicles became general, though unhappily the camel cacolets had to be retained for use in the hills.

But perhaps most important of all the changes brought about by the deliverance from the desert was the increased mobility given to the mounted troops. Prodigious things had been done by the horses on Sinai. They had revealed a capacity to endure without water scarcely inferior to that of the camels, to which as a means of transport for mounted rifles they had proved incomparably superior. Nevertheless they had been painfully restricted by the heavy sand. From the Canal to El Arish they had rarely moved beyond a walking pace. The slowness of their marching and the increased carrying of supplies which it had entailed, as in the expedition against Maghara, had prolonged all operations and necessitated the employment of many thousands of extra camels and great numbers of drivers.

Sir Archibald, again, was well pleased with the conduct of recent operations by his two new lieutenants, Dobell and Chetwode, and might well have believed that he now possessed generals to whom he could safely entrust the translation of his Cairo strategy into vigorous and successful action. But, as at Romani, one vital essential was still lacking in his force at El Arish. The army was without the inspiration of robust leadership. Murray, directing the campaign from Cairo, was in almost the same position as a minister of war at Whitehall who sometimes insists in meddling with the tactics of a distant army. The Commander-in-Chief was quite unable from his headquarters at the Savoy Hotel to master in detail the conditions in southern Palestine; nor was he disposed, or

authorised by his Government, to delegate a proper measure of responsibility to his subordinates. As a minister for war he was far too active; as a commander-in-chief he was not nearly active enough.

To make matters worse, Murray was from Romani onwards an unpopular leader with his troops. Officers and men of Anzac Mounted Division interpreted his unfortunate despatch concerning that engagement, and the consequent issue of awards, as an active demonstration of prejudice. The extreme measures of discipline imposed on both his mounted troops and his infantry, during their rare and brief periods of leave in Cairo and Port Said, caused General Headquarters as a whole to be looked upon in a spirit far from cordial. The men cheerfully accepted as part of their voluntary service all the disciplinary measures which had any conceivable bearing upon the efficient conduct of the war. But the degree to which the men visiting Cairo and Port Said were angered by exclusion from the reputable hotels, and worried about formalities—while at the same time no sane steps were taken to safeguard their welfare in other directions—engendered a feeling of bitterness which did not contribute to the success of operations. All British soldiers are hero-worshippers, and Murray was not in their eyes a hero. The front was without any sense of the presence of a great leader.

In February Murray decided, as a preliminary to his general advance, to clean up the remaining Turkish garrisons in Sinai. Columns were sent against El Hassana, which lies in the hills some thirty-three miles south-south-west of Magdhaba, and against Nekhl, the old seat of British administration. The 2nd Battalion (British) of the Camel Brigade, under Major Bassett, marched from Magdhaba on February 17th and, travelling by night, surrounded Hassana at dawn on the following morning. On the appearance of the force the Turks surrendered without resistance. Throughout the campaign the extremely unsanitary conditions under which the Turks lived and fought were a constant source of amazement to the British army. The Hassana post was indescribably filthy. A dead camel lay in the middle of the camp, and a dead cow in a building close beside the house occupied by the Commandant, who, however, appeared quite indifferent to its

presence. While the post was being surrounded, Lance-Corporal MacGregor was shot and severely wounded by armed Bedouins; it was found impossible to evacuate him on a camel cacolet, and he was therefore carried back to El Arish in one of the aeroplanes which had been co-operating with the force.

Three columns were employed for the conquest of Nekhl. A yeomanry force marched from Suez by the Mitla Pass and the Darb el Haj; Lieutenant-Colonel Grant led the 11th Australian Light Horse Regiment and one company of the Camel Brigade out from Serapeum by the Wady um Muksheib, Bir el Giddi, and the Baha Pass; while Bassett, after securing Hassana, was to endeavour to block the escape of the enemy towards the east. The garrison was known to be insignificant, and the use of so much strength by the British was intended to make a clean and final sweep of the enemy from Sinai, and also to impress the Bedouins. Nekhl, with its few stone houses, a mosque, and a well, situated on the heights of the forbidding desert ranges, was entered on February 17th—three days after Grant's force left the Canal—by a squadron of the 11th Light Horse, riding with fixed bayonets, under Captain C. A. R. Munro. Grant on his approach learned from a British airman that the garrison was evacuating, and accordingly pushed in without waiting for the arrival of the column from Suez. A few Turks and armed Arabs were taken, and the expedition definitely marked the expulsion of the Turks from the Peninsula; but it is chiefly to be remembered because of the fine marching accomplished by the camel-transport which accompanied Grant's column. The camels, led by Egyptians on foot, covered 150 miles in seven consecutive days—a wonderful feat of endurance over a route which ran most of the way along steep and narrow mountain tracks, rocky and difficult.

Sinai was now clear; but much preliminary work was still necessary before the army could be directed towards Palestine. Having allowed Chauvel's horsemen to debouch from the desert without opposition and secure a foothold on the firm soil of the plains, the Turks were obliged to fall right back to the Gaza-Beersheba line in order to secure a strong defensive position based on an adequate supply of water. For some weeks they left a garrison of about 4,000 troops in a carefully

prepared position at Weli Sheikh Nuran, a few miles west of Shellal; but the fate of Magdhaba and Rafa had made them heartily respect the Anzac brigades and the Camels, and early in March this force was withdrawn. This left the country ahead of the British clear for about thirty miles, from El Arish to the Gaza-Beersheba gateway of Palestine.

Murray's first step was to push forward his infantry for some miles along the coast, and to establish a strong patrol of mounted troops over the country to the south-east, which gave protection to the base at El Arish and to the progress of the railway. The 42nd Infantry Division reached El Arish in January, but a week later was withdrawn to the Canal; soon afterwards it left Egypt, and its place in Dobell's force was taken by the 53rd Division under Major-General A. G. Dallas. The 53rd Division had shared in the unsuccessful fighting at Suvla Bay in August, 1915, and was afterwards engaged upon the western frontier of Egypt. It arrived at El Arish in good condition and not without experience of war, and its officers and men were keen for an opportunity to efface the unfortunate affair in Gallipoli. Immediately after arrival, the division was sent forward to Sheikh Zowaiid, where Chauvel also had his headquarters, to prepare an advanced line of defensive posts, to develop the water, and to carry forward the wire-netting road along the coast.

By the beginning of March, Murray was preparing for the most ambitious project attempted since he crossed the Canal. Gaza was to be assailed; if the enterprise should prove successful, the British force would be definitely committed to the conquest of Palestine. It is desirable at this stage, therefore, to consider in broad outline the physical geography of the Holy Land, and the country northwards as far as the Taurus Mountains.

Syria and Palestine, taken together, are a narrow strip of country extending from Asia Minor in the north to the borders of Sinai in the south, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the Arabian Desert on the east. The width of this strip seldom exceeds 100 miles. Even if all Syria is included in the Holy Land, the most significant patch of soil on the earth's surface is still a very small country. But Palestine proper, that is to say, the region inhabited by the tribes of

Israel and familiar to Christ, did not include the northern country now known as Syria. From Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south the distance is only about 145 miles, while from Jaffa on the coast to Amman, close to the edge of the Arabian Desert in eastern Palestine, it is not more than seventy-five.

A motor-car in the course of a summer's day could comfortably traverse the land from east to west and north to south. The driver, beginning his day's journey from the north, would cross the fertile plain of Gennesaret, skirt the sparkling waters of Galilee, get a glimpse of dark and evil Tiberias, pass through Nazareth set in its saucer in the hills, and then cross the Esdraelon plain, with its echoes of a thousand battles, and climb up to the heights of Samaria. Passing between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, he would enter Nablus (the old Shechem), the most pleasant, perhaps, of all the cities of the mountain region. Travelling on to the south, Jerusalem would be traversed, then Bethlehem, and the mountain road would be followed down through Hebron, where the patriarchs are buried, and where the fanatical Moslem natives have fortunately kept the tourist at bay and so have remained relatively independent and uncorrupted. The brief journey would be completed at the bare, straggling little modern town of Beersheba.

From west to east the passage is even shorter. Taking the good road from Jaffa across the Philistine plain, the car would enter the heights of Judæa by the valley of Ajalon, the old route of the Crusaders. From Jerusalem the road leads by Bethany down through the stark Wilderness country to Jericho, on the edge of the valley of the Jordan and thence across the river up the steep new road to Es Salt in Gilead, and across the plateau, the fertile grazing land which tempted Gad and Reuben, to Amman.

But if the Holy Land is small, it is strikingly diverse. Yet, with all its swift changes in elevation, soil, and vegetation, it is divided into belts capable of simple description. All the way from the Lebanons in the north to the slopes of southern Palestine the country is marked by the same bold features. Beginning on the Mediterranean, there is first the fertile coastal margin which, very narrow between the foot-hills of

the Lebanons and the sea, opens out south of the Ladder of Tyre into the plains of Acre and Esdraelon. Then, after passing the narrow way between the sea and Mount Carmel, it spreads out over the plain of Sharon, or the northern sweeps of the old maritime plain. Marching with Sharon on the east are the soft, round hills of Samaria, divided by many fertile valleys. South of Jaffa the maritime plain becomes the plain of the Philistines, which continues south as far as a line drawn east from Gaza, and is flanked on the east by the harsh and rugged fastnesses of Judæa. Ranging from twelve to twenty-five miles in width from Jaffa to Gaza, and about sixty miles in length, Philistia is, in its regular rainfall, its mild sunny winters, its genial summers tempered by never-failing breezes from the sea, and its rich, easily-tilled soil, one of the blessed places of the world.

East of this favoured coastal fringe looms from north to south the great central Palestine range. Descending from the snow-clad heights of Hermon in the north, this impressive mountain system becomes, on the west of the Jordan depression, first the hills of Galilee; then, after being cut across by the Esdraelon plain, the mountains of Samaria and Judæa. On the east of Jordan the system appears in the mountains of Gilead and Moab. Continued still to the south, the range, becoming more broken and irregular, extends into the gaunt and rainless heights of the Sinai Peninsula and, after being cleft by the Red Sea, pushes down into Egypt as far as the Mokattam Hills beside Cairo. Remarkable because of the striking contrast between its snowy summits in the north and its desert peaks in the south, the great central range is made unique by virtue of the great Jordan gorge, which splits it asunder from end to end, and gives to the world the two lands of eastern and western Palestine. This wonderful feature begins in the rich Baalbek plain, or valley of the Orontes, driven down as a great wedge from the north between the Lebanons on the west and the Anti-Lebanons on the east. Narrowing towards the south, the Baalbek depression emerges from the Lebanons into the marshes where the Jordan has its origin above Lake Huleh in the land of Dan. The marshes above Huleh catch the soakage of southern Lebanon and the perennial waters from snow-capped Hermon.

From Lake Huleh begins the rushing fall of the Jordan, as it races down to an extreme depth of 1,290 feet below sea-level in the Dead Sea. There, having no outlet, and confined by the glaring desert mountains walls, the water becomes heated and evaporates under the fierce sun. Southwards from the Dead Sea the bed of the gorge rises and widens, but is still a weird, clearly defined depression, until it falls again into the Gulf of Akaba. East of this depression, as we have seen, there are from north to south, first the eastern range of the Lebanons, then—after a descent to broken stony ridges on the western fringe of the Hauran plain—the dark timbered heights of Gilead, and the bare frowning mountains of Moab; after which, flanking the eastern side of the Dead Sea, the range becomes the Mountains of Hor, or Seir, and is continued down to Akaba, whither came in ancient times the ships of the Orient laden with splendid wares for the court of King Solomon.

Thus while from north to south there is a continuity in the physical features of Syria and Palestine, the changes from east to west have, perhaps, no parallel in any other zone only a hundred miles wide. In a sixty-mile motor drive on a summer's day, from Jaffa on the Mediterranean coast to Es Salt in Gilead east of the Jordan, the traveller would enjoy for twenty-five miles across the Philistine plain the balmy air of the Riviera in spring. Then climbing 2,600 feet, he would, at Jerusalem, be in a crisp, keen mountain atmosphere. Leaving the Holy City by the Jericho road, he would at once notice an extraordinary contrast between the eastern and western slopes of this phenomenal little country. On the approach to Jerusalem from the coast the harsh hillside of Judæa is broken by many green fertile patches of cultivation, with tiny plantations of olive-trees and vines huddled in little valleys, or held up by remnants of ancient stone terraces. Numerous old stone-built villages tell of the producing capacity of the land. But after passing Bethany, about two miles north-east of Jerusalem, the road falls through the wilderness of Judah, a broken rocky waste, devoid, except for a few weeks in the spring, of the least vegetation or sustenance, and in the summer dusty, glaring, and forbidding. Falling rapidly, the road leads out on to the clay flats of the Jordan

valley, where during month after month in the summer season the shade temperature seldom falls below 100 degrees Fahr., and occasionally exceeds 125 degrees.

East from Jericho the valley is about ten miles wide; then, climbing up the new road which skirts the wild ravine of the Wady Nimrin, the traveller finds himself in a world entirely different from that through which he has just passed in the wilderness on the west of the Jordan. The mountain-side, although quite as steep as the slope of the western range, is relatively soft, and even in midsummer is rich in vegetation. As the road leads up to Es Salt and crosses the plateau towards Amman, near the fringe of the Arabian Desert, through the balmy air, fertile valleys, fat and rolling pastures, and teeming flocks and herds of the happy land of Moab, the unfailing truth of the descriptions of the Old Testament is once more established.

The line from Gaza to Beersheba, which barred the gateway to the Philistine plain and to Palestine as a whole, lends itself admirably to defence. Few cities have changed hands so frequently as Gaza. Its conquest has, since the beginning of civilisation, always been a preliminary step for the invasion of Egypt from the north or for an advance from the Nile towards Palestine. Dehliz el Moulk ("Threshold of the Kingdom") is the name given to the town by the Arabs. "The outpost of Africa and the door of Asia," "the Palestine Thermopylæ," and many similar denominations, ancient and modern, express its military significance. One of the five cities of the Philistine league, it has been assailed and captured by the Hebrews, the Pharaohs, Assyrians, Ptolemies, and by Alexander and Pompey and Napoleon. The ancient city stood close to the sea, but the modern town lies about two miles inland, on a low hill at the inner edge of the coastal sand-dunes; thence it dominates an undulating plain about eighty square miles in extent, between the Wady Hesi on the north and the Wady Ghuzze on the south, and stretching east to the foot-hills of the Shephelah. Perhaps no position invested during the war was so strongly equipped with natural defences against modern weapons.

Most of the villages of the Philistine plain are more or less surrounded by a network of tiny fields, enclosed by wide.

tall cactus hedges, which are not only capable of bringing infantry to a halt, but are in a large measure proof against machine-gun and rifle fire. For some miles around Gaza the sprawling cactus stands eight or ten feet high, and from six to fifteen feet across. The area presents a complicated maze to an invading army; when strengthened with trenches and held in force, it proved almost unassailable by frontal attack. The defenders, with their infantry and machine-gunners protected by the hedges, and the observers for their artillery on the high ground behind, enjoyed an extraordinary control over troops advancing to the attack across the open plain to the east and south. Towards the sea the position was screened by steep and heavy sand-dunes. Outside the cactus, to the north and north-east of the town, was a wide olive-grove, and nearer the sand-dunes an expanse of orange-groves.

In Palestine, as in Sinai, the march of armies has ever been controlled by the water-supply, and the only source normally capable of supporting a large force during the summer lies along the coast. Off the coast, from the Wady el Arish up to Jaffa, the supply, except in winter, is drawn from well-springs and stone cisterns sunk in the ground to catch the floods. This supply is limited, and can only be won slowly and at great labour. Consequently armies marching to and from Egypt have always followed the seaboard, and the capture of Gaza has been imperative. In earlier wars, when great forces marched and fought on a narrow front, the taking of the town opened the way to the Philistine plain from the south, and to southern Palestine and Sinai from the north. But as Murray and his advanced leaders clearly saw, the capture of Gaza by the British Army in 1917, while a preliminary necessity to the advance up the Philistine plain, would not immediately achieve far-reaching results. It was in a sense the western key of the Gaza-Beersheba line of advance; but Murray had not yet at his command either the troops or the communications necessary to march far into Philistia.

When early in March Murray decided to attack the town, the Turks had in the Gaza-Beersheba area about 15,000 troops, of which 4,000 were believed to be in the town itself, perhaps 2,000 at Beersheba, and the remainder on the surrounding

country. Between the Wady el Arish and the large Wady Ghuzze—which ran parallel to the Turkish defensive line, a few miles to the south—lies a rolling plain about thirty miles in width from west to east. With the exception of a few scattered wells, useless for military purposes, this tract of the southern Palestine plain is waterless away from the coast; but springs abound along the edge of the Mediterranean from El Arish to the mouth of the Ghuzze, while at Khan Yunis, Beni Sela, and Deir el Belah the supply is unlimited.

While the British advance must follow the coast, the enemy with the assistance of German and Austrian engineers, had substantially improved his water-supply at Beersheba and other places south-east of Gaza, so that he was enabled to distribute his force right across the barrier from Gaza to Beersheba. True, the British mounted troops might engage in flying inland raids, but the infantry could not follow; nor could the horsemen expect to prolong a fight which did not immediately give them victory and possession of the Turkish water-supply. As subsequent events clearly showed, Murray's snatch at Gaza was premature. Had he been successful, the town might have been held; but it is very doubtful whether his small army could have pushed up the coast, leaving the Turks strong on his exposed right flank. But, if the advance on Gaza was a somewhat lightly-considered venture, it was undertaken with a spirit of vigour and confidence which gave it every promise of at least the conquest of its immediate objective. Perfect early spring weather and good country for marching favoured the undertaking; and troops substantially above the strength which might have been expected to carry the enterprise to a successful conclusion were at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief.

General Murray, in his official despatch on the campaign dated 28th June, 1917, shows that the War Office, in a letter written on January 11th, accepted in principle his proposals for an autumn campaign in Palestine. But, instead of granting him, as he had requested, five infantry divisions for the defence of Egypt and the offensive campaign, the 42nd Division was, as we have seen, taken away, and he was left with only the 52nd, 53rd, and 54th Divisions, whilst the 74th, made up of dismounted yeomanry, was in process of formation.

Murray's determination under the circumstances to attempt the capture of Gaza was characteristic of his aggressive spirit throughout his command in Egypt.

Early in the year, therefore, Dobell had under his command in Eastern Force only three infantry divisions, the 52nd (Lowland), the 53rd (Welsh Territorial), and the 54th (East Anglian). But, if he was disappointed in the strength of his infantry, his mounted troops had been materially increased. The Imperial Mounted Division, made up of the 3rd and 4th Australian Light Horse Brigades and the 5th and 6th Yeomanry Brigades, was formed under the command of Major-General H. W. Hodgson,¹ and the place of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in Anzac Mounted Division was taken by the 22nd Yeomanry Brigade. In February the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade was created in Egypt under Brigadier-General J. B. Meredith, who had handled the 1st Light Horse Brigade so admirably at Romani. Of its three regiments—the 4th (Victoria), the 11th (Queensland and South Australia), and the 12th (New South Wales)—the 11th was the only one with experience in the Sinai operations; but the 4th and 12th had been for a year on the desert, and, as they soon demonstrated, were quite equal in fighting quality to the rest of the light horse regiments.

If the officers and men of the British and Australian mounted units were now becoming better friends, the attitude of all Australians on the front towards General Murray and his staff was certainly not improved by the formation of the Imperial Mounted Division. Murray and his advisers could scarcely have been less tactful than they were at this time. The Australians had now been in the field for more than two years, and during nearly the whole of that time had been engaged in actual operations. The light horsemen strongly wished the name "Australian" to be associated with the new formation, and expected also that a reasonable share of the staff positions would be given to their officers. But, with one or two notable exceptions, the officers of the British Regular Army in Egypt and Palestine, and especially those in high command, showed themselves liable to exhibit in matters of

¹ Maj.-Gen Sir Henry W. Hodgson, K.C.M.G., C.B., C.V.O. Officer of British Regular Army; of Sussex, Eng., b. London, Eng., 29 June, 1868. Died, 5 Feb., 1930.

Imperial sentiment and in their dealings with Dominion troops an astonishing ignorance which, even if it had no more serious or permanent result, could only react harmfully upon the relations between them.

No exception was taken at that time to the appointment of General Hodgson, who, if not an inspired soldier, was a sound leader along conventional lines, and who possessed moreover a sympathetic and engaging personality which went far to make him acceptable to the light horsemen. Nevertheless there were, both in Palestine and France, a number of Australian light horse officers of rank and experience in mounted warfare equal to Hodgson's. But the constitution of the staff of the new division was, in its foolish disregard of Dominion sentiment, a very unfortunate blunder. The war had almost reached its final year before insistent pressure by Chauvel introduced a change which enabled Australian officers in Palestine, other than regular soldiers, to hold subordinate staff appointments.

The evil results from such a policy were obvious and many. In Palestine the army early in 1917 was staffed by officers of whom many were low in capacity. Highly capable officers both in the Australian and New Zealand brigades were ignored. Hodgson's divisional headquarters included nineteen officers, of whom, at the outset, two, Captain W. J. Urquhart,² the junior staff officer and a Duntroon graduate, and Major F. Murray-Jones,³ the veterinary officer, were Australians; the rest were British. When the Camel Brigade, three-fourths of whose men were Australians and New Zealanders, was formed a few weeks before, every staff position was given to British officers. Later in the year, Brigadier-General Sir Robert Anderson,⁴ an Australian business man who had been sent abroad by the Commonwealth Government on special administrative work, visited General Headquarters in Cairo and had a stormy interview with the British Commander-in-Chief. The result of Anderson's strong representation,

² Lt.-Col. W. J. Urquhart, G.S.O.(3) Anzac Mtd. Div., 1916/18. Duntroon graduate; of Brisbane, Q'land, b. Melbourne, Vic., 17 March, 1894.

³ Lieut.-Col. F. Murray-Jones, V.D.; A.A.V.C. Government veterinary surgeon; of Adelaide, b. 18 May, 1882.

⁴ Brig.-Gen. Sir Robert M. McCheyne Anderson, K.C.M.G. Commandant Admin. H.Q., A.I.F., London, 1916/17. Merchant and contractor; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 6 Aug., 1867.

coupled with a promise that an additional Australian brigade would be found for the Imperial Mounted Division, led to its name being changed to Australian Mounted Division. This brigade was not sent; but nearly a year later, when the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade was disbanded, two new light horse regiments were formed and added to the division as part of the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade. In the latter half of 1918 an Australian aide-de-camp was the sole representative of the light horse on General Allenby's vast headquarters staff at Bir Salem. Much trouble would have been avoided had some instruction upon the internal relations and ideals of the British Empire formed part of the curriculum in the training institutions of the British Regular Army.

As the army increased at El Arish, and before the sources along the beach to the north-east were developed, the water-supply taxed all the energy of the engineers. Three huge sets of pumping plants were working day and night at Kantara forcing the flow across the desert. After passing under the Canal the water had its first reservoir, of 600,000 gallons capacity, at Kantara East. One 5-inch pipe then carried the local supply to Dueidar, and a 6-inch pipe the local supply to Pelusium, Romani, and Mahemdia, while a 12-inch pipe bore the main supply further east across the desert. At Romani a concrete reservoir contained 600,000 gallons, another at Bir el Abd 500,000, and one at Mazar 500,000; a reservoir of similar capacity was building at El Arish. Pumping machinery at the intermediate reservoirs worked ceaselessly to drive the supply from station to station. The horses and camels were usually watered at the local wells, and the vast flow from Kantara was reserved for the troops. But the horse- and camel-feed necessary for the huge mounted and transport forces at El Arish and eastward imposed on the railway and the ships along the coast a burden which it was difficult to maintain. As Murray's mounted brigades were increased, this task was made still heavier; he therefore gave orders that horses should be fed upon the growing crops of southern Palestine and compensation paid to their Arab owners. Among the regiments this order was received with the greatest satisfaction; and, although it did not substantially

reduce the supplies of hard feed necessary to keep the animals in working condition, it had an immediate effect upon their health and spirits.

At the end of February Murray spent a few days at advanced-headquarters, and personally rode over the country to the east of Sheikh Zowaiid. Dobell, always an optimist, took at this time a very rosy view of the position, and the Commander-in-Chief appears to have shared to the full his lieutenant's confidence. The high hopes of the leaders were stimulated by the belief that the Turks contemplated a withdrawal from southern Palestine to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, some sixty miles to the north. The current story was that von Kressenstein and the Turkish leaders were at variance. The German commander strongly desired to stand on the line from Gaza to Beersheba, but the Turks intended to overrule him and go back. At the same time General Headquarters received "absolutely reliable" information that the Turkish forces in southern Arabia were abandoning the country to Hussein, and would join von Kressenstein in Palestine. It was anticipated, however, that this movement would take many weeks to accomplish; and Murray urged Dobell to be ready for a vigorous pursuit, if a withdrawal from the Gaza-Beersheba line was attempted, with a view to the destruction of the enemy when he was in the open. Hopes were indeed high at General Headquarters in those days.

Murray appears to have attached great importance to the recent arrival of six tanks and a considerable supply of gas shells from England. The tanks had been landed at the Canal, great pains being taken to keep their presence secret as they were smuggled up the line. But tanks do not lend themselves to concealment, and it is highly probable that the enemy, whose intelligence was good, knew all about them long before they reached El Arish. His German leaders were perhaps not much exercised in their minds about Murray's new weapons. British officers on the front who had seen the tanks at work in France were emphatic that they would be ineffective on the exposed, hard country immediately north of Wady Ghuzze, and that the ground, cut up as it was with branches of the wady, would be in places too rough for their progress. Experts also pointed out that the clear

light atmosphere and constant winds of southern Palestine, together with the absence of a concentrated enemy, would make the successful use of gas very doubtful.

Early in March Murray, in a despatch to the War Office, told of the evacuation of Sheikh Nuran, and summed up the position generally. "The latest information," he said, "appears to indicate that the enemy retirement will not stop on the Gaza-Beersheba line; further, it would appear that the force at the enemy's disposal is inadequate to hold a line of so great an extent, and, should he hold it, it can be broken by us at any point. It will be some time before the enemy's forces in Arabia can join the force south of Jerusalem." Murray added that, should the enemy stand on the Gaza-Beersheba line, Desert Column would attack as soon as possible, selecting Gaza as the first objective. With three echelons of trains, Dobell's force could be kept at work twenty miles from railhead; and the Commander-in-Chief considered that the presence of three divisions of infantry and two mounted divisions about Gaza, and the advance of the railway to that town, should ensure the loss to the enemy of the whole of southern Palestine south of the Hebron-Wady el Hesi line, and "all the attendant political advantages that may entail." Murray on March 15th, in a further appreciation, advised the War Office that indications pointed to the evacuation of Gaza before the British advance. Desert Column was ready to push into Gaza on the heels of the retreating enemy. "If he maintains his present disposition," he said, "the small detachments left at Gaza will not be able to offer any effective opposition to Desert Column."

Soon after the destruction of the Turks at Rafa, Dobell decided to remove the native population from Sheikh Zowaiid in order to prevent leakage of information. The villagers were therefore brought within the British lines, and forbidden to migrate towards the east. Despite such a step, however, it was throughout the campaign extremely difficult to prevent the Bedouins from moving freely through the widely scattered, lightly held front. The many peoples of the near East are all more or less dark in complexion, and the flowing dress of the country favoured disguise. In the circumstances it was remarkable how often in the long march from the Canal

to Aleppo the Turks were completely surprised by Chauvel's mounted forces.

While the British leaders were laying their plans for the advance on Gaza, the war as a whole was going badly for the Turks. Maude⁵ was making good progress in Mesopotamia, and the Arab intervention was proving a serious drain on the enemy's resources. Nor was there anything in the Turkish campaign in southern Palestine to fire the enthusiasm of the troops. They were fighting in a country which had never been inhabited by Turkish people, and which was as alien to them as it was to the British. They were in a region almost destitute of local supplies. The Arabs had, it is true, numerous flocks and herds which might have been seized by the Turkish commanders, but such a step would have antagonised the natives. The Bedouins, although incapable of organised fighting, might have been dangerous raiders on the Turkish extended communications; if they had engaged in systematic guerilla warfare they would have made his position almost unendurable. The Turks were therefore obliged to bring all their supplies from Damascus and further north. Corruption was always rampant in the Turkish Army in the field, and, as the Government at Constantinople was now far away, was carried on with but slight fear of detection or punishment. Among the Turkish officers there were many sincere patriots who served the men to the best of their ability: but the system of rationing, which made grants of money to the senior officers and allowed them to provide for their troops, was, as might have been expected, generally abused. Officers enriched themselves by cutting down supplies to the lowest possible point, and the rank and file were during the war often reduced to the meanest diet, and were frequently wretchedly clothed.

Such conditions would have been fatal to the spirit and fighting capacity of any European troops engaged in a similar campaign. But the Turk as a fighter is unlike any other soldier in the world. Even when he is wretchedly fed and miserably equipped, and is fighting for a cause which by any Western standard might be expected to excite only his antagonism,

⁵ Lieut.-Gen. Sir Stanley Maude, K C B., C M G., D S O., p s c. Commanded 13th Div., 1915/16. Tigris Army Corps, 1916. Mesopot Exped Force, 1916/17. Of London, b. Gibraltar, 24 June, 1864. Died of cholera, 18 Nov., 1917.

he will continue month after month and year after year a dangerous foe to troops of a higher civilisation fighting under the happiest conditions. No set of circumstances, however depressing, appears able to diminish his dogged resistance, while if the opportunity is propitious he can always be stirred to the offensive.

CHAPTER XVII

FIRST GAZA ENGAGEMENT

ON March 18th Chetwode, who then had his Desert Column advanced-headquarters at Sheikh Zowaiid, conferred with Chauvel, Hodgson, and Dallas of the 53rd Division, and plans were completed for the attack on Gaza. The possibility of a general Turkish retirement in the event of a decisive British success at Gaza was discussed. Chetwode, in whom the cavalry instinct was always strong, emphasised the necessity of preparing the mounted troops for a vigorous pursuit. Arrangements were made to transfer the supply waggons, with their horse teams, from the 52nd and 53rd Divisions to the two mounted divisions in exchange for the camels of the latter, so that Chauvel and Hodgson should have all possible mobility. The Turks had withdrawn from Khan Yunis, and the village had been occupied by Anzac Mounted Division, and the water-supply developed. On March 22nd Chetwode advanced his headquarters to Rafa.

Dobell was well aware that, if the Turks anticipated his attack on Gaza and concentrated the bulk of their troops in the area Gaza-Beersheba-Huj-Shellal, the position, with its exceptional natural defences, would be unassailable by the troops at his command. Day after day German pilots flew over the British camps; the superiority of their machines enabled them easily to outclimb and outpace the British airmen, a fact which made them very daring in reconnaissance. As the British force was moved forward, special care was therefore taken to avoid this vigilant observation. All marches were made by night, the troops being concealed as far as possible in the sand-dunes by day.

For his operations against Gaza Dobell decided to base his advanced-force on Deir el Belah. The site was almost ideal for the purpose. Belah, a small native village, lies at the edge of the coastal sand-dunes, which, for a distance of two or three miles, are there fringed with many groups of palms. These and the pockets between the sand-hills gave good cover to horses and troops. The clean sand made a perfect camp area, particularly in the winter weather, while

the hard ground of the treeless plain to the north and east made all movement simple and rapid.

Belah lies ten miles south-west of Gaza. Half-way between the two a great irregular gash is torn across the plain by the Wady Ghuzze, which, fed in the wet season by many tributaries from the western slope of the central range, interposes a strong barrier south-eastwards from the coast. ("Wady" is a comprehensive Arabic term for water-courses of every size, from a mere dry gutter to a great feature like the Ghuzze. Arabic has apparently no equivalents for our specific "creek," "brook," and "river.") A characteristic wady, the Ghuzze is more favoured than most of the streams of southern Palestine; in addition to its winter floods, when it rolls down in a great muddy torrent several feet deep—and between Gaza and Belah more than a hundred yards in width—it is fed in summer by a number of springs in its bed, which, although they do not maintain its flow, provide permanent water for the natives. Its floor lies some thirty or forty feet deep between rugged banks of broken, sandy clay, opening out on either side into innumerable spacious bays. In the spring of the year, with the rain diminishing, it was fordable at many places; consequently, while it offered an easy passage to Dobell's troops, it promised, in the event of failure, an excellent basis of defence if the Turk should retaliate with a counter-attack.

On March 25th a general reconnaissance of the Gaza position was made by the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade. Crossing the Wady Ghuzze, with supporting troops kept as well concealed as possible, a mounted screen pushed up close to the town on the south-east, and staff officers riding immediately behind were able to make a close personal survey of the ground, in view of the advance which had been decided upon for the following morning. At the same time working parties tested the water in the wady, and prepared crossings for the troops. The Turks opened long-distance fire on the screen, but appeared to have no inkling of the close proximity of the British divisions; Dobell and Chetwode were hopeful that night that their cautious advance was still unknown to the enemy, and that they would take the garrison by surprise in the morning.

As darkness fell, Chetwode's Desert Column troops moved to camping grounds in the Belah area. All lights and fires were forbidden. The few hours which remained before 2.30 on the morning of the 26th, when the advance was to begin, were spent in completing arrangements, and very few of the men obtained sleep. The troops, especially the infantry, had been on the move for two or three nights, and were, in consequence, already somewhat tired. But the weather was keen and the going sound, and all ranks were in good physical condition for forced marching and battle.

Running north and south about 1,200 yards east of Gaza is a long, irregular ridge, which extends almost to the Wady Ghuzze. From the Ghuzze to a point abreast of Gaza this feature was known as the El Sire Ridge; further north it was afterwards described as "Anzac Ridge." Rising from it, about 1,500 yards south-east of the town, is the knoll Ali el Muntar. Flanked on either side by intricate little fields enclosed with cactus, the Ali Muntar position, although only 300 feet above sea-level and a few acres in extent, was the key to the defence of Gaza against attack from the south and east. Troops concealed in the cactus on its flanks could effectively sweep the bare plain country to the east and south-west, and also cover any approach along the ridge itself from the south; while artillery observers on its summit, which was at that time marked by the large tomb of a sheikh, could direct the fire of the gunners behind with great accuracy. A few hundred yards south of Ali Muntar the enemy line turned off along the fringe of the cactus hedges towards the Mediterranean, so that Gaza was contained against the British attack in a rough right angle, with the hedges and the sand-dunes nearer the sea covering the south, and Ali Muntar ridge guarding the east. Ali Muntar and the ridge immediately north and south of it dominated Gaza and the Turkish line through the cactus on the south. If the knoll could be seized by the British early in the attack, the fall of the town was assured. Dobell believed that, if Ali Muntar could be taken, the rest would be easy.

The latest information possessed by the British commander on the night of the 25th was that Gaza was held by only 4,000 troops under the command of Tala Bey, and that the enemy's

closest support was at Hareira, ten miles to the south-east. Other Turkish forces were known to be at Tel el Sheria, sixteen miles to the south-west; at Khurbet el Akra, beyond Huj and twelve miles north-east of Gaza; and at Tel en Nejile, on the railway seventeen miles distant. In other words, Dobell and Chetwode believed that 4,000 troops were isolated at Gaza, with a ring of reinforcements, of which none were nearer than ten miles. But in actual fact the intervening country was a hard, rolling plain, over which the Turks, if they moved to the assistance of Gaza, could march swiftly; while in Gaza itself, and within a radius of from ten to seventeen miles, the enemy had a total force of about 15,000 rifles.

Against this force Dobell had within a few miles of the Ghuzze, on the night of the 25th, the 53rd and 54th Infantry Divisions, a total of about 16,000 rifles; Anzac Mounted Division, less the 1st Light Horse Brigade, about 2,400 dismounted rifles; the Imperial Mounted Division, less the 4th Light Horse Brigade, about 2,400 dismounted rifles; and about 1,200 rifles in the Camel Brigade—a total force of about 22,000 effectives. And when the mobility of the mounted brigades is remembered, and also the fact that the 5th, 6th, and 22nd Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigades of the Imperial Mounted Division carried swords, and so were complete as cavalry, it is taking too little account of them to consider them merely as dismounted rifles.

With this advantage in numbers and mobility, the prospect of successfully rushing Gaza before Turkish reinforcements could arrive appeared exceedingly good. Only one possibility threatened the enterprise with failure. Were the British misinformed as to the true strength of the garrison? Had the Turks, like the British, been moving at night? If they had thrown a few thousand additional troops into the town within the last few nights, and had closed in from the north and east generally towards the position, Dobell's task was certain to be formidable. The British battle-plans were based on the assumption that the information was correct. Dobell's scheme was simple, and was designed to allow the fullest time possible for storming the town. The attack was to be made by the Desert Column under Chetwode, but Dobell was himself active in the preparations, and he decided to retain the 54th

Division under his direct control. The advanced-headquarters of Desert Column and Eastern Force were together during the operation, at a point on the Belah side of the Ghuzze—an arrangement which, as might have been expected, led to excessive leadership without ensuring the strong direct driving force essential to success. Chetwode aimed to fling in the 53rd Division on a frontal attack against the position from the south-east, while the Anzac Mounted Division under Chauvel, having enveloped the town on the north-east and north as far round as the coast, would advance a light force to guard against counter-attack from Deir Sineid and Nejed to the north. At the same time Hodgson, with the Imperial Mounted Division, would take up a position facing generally east and north-east to contain the enemy's reinforcements; his line would be continued to Wady Ghuzze at Tel el Jemmi by the Camel Brigade, which would act as a pivot for the mounted troops. The 54th Division, which was encamped on the night of the 25th about Inseirat, would press forward across the Ghuzze in readiness to support the 53rd, and was to assist the Imperial Mounted Division if the latter were strongly attacked.

Chauvel led Anzac Mounted Division from its camp near Belah at 2.30 in the morning of March 26th. The 7th Light Horse Regiment of the 2nd Brigade formed the screen, and despite the "pitch-black darkness" good progress was made as far as the Ghuzze, which was crossed near Um Jerrar, the traditional birthplace of Isaac. The Imperial Mounted Division moved simultaneously, while the 53rd Infantry Division under Dallas marched towards the wady near El Breij, two and a half miles nearer the sea. Smith with the Camel Brigade moved further to the east, and crossed at Tel el Jemmi, with orders to clear the front of the 54th Division, which was following Hodgson to its place of readiness across the wady.

The country for a mile or two on either side of the wady was broken with branches from the waterway, and was very rough. A heavy fog fell as the 2nd Light Horse Brigade approached the Ghuzze, and made the work of the guides extremely difficult; but Captain S. A. Tooth¹ of the 6th

¹ Maj. S. A. Tooth, D.S.O. 6th L.H. Regt. Station manager; of Aramac, Q'land; b. Clifton, Darling Downs, Q'land, 12 Feb., 1884.

Light Horse Regiment, and Captain H. O. C. Maddrell² of the 7th, who were entrusted with the lead, located the crossing without loss of time, and Ryrie's brigade, the New Zealanders, and the 22nd Yeomanry Brigade passed the obstacle at the appointed time. After clearing the wady, the guides were given half-an-hour to check their bearings, while the division was consolidating. Tooth and Maddrell then led the way slowly but confidently through the dense fog before dawn, on a line a few miles east of Gaza, passing through El Kutshan, Sheikh Abbas, Khurbet er Rseim, Khurbet Kufieh, and thence to the native village of Jebalie three miles north-east of the town. So thick was the fog that each section of horsemen was almost invisible to the one which followed, and the march was only maintained by the ceaseless activity of gallopers between advance-guard and main body. Ryrie's true soldier instinct told him that the fog, although an embarrassment, made observation by the Turkish outposts impossible and greatly improved his chances of taking the enemy by surprise. "It is believed," said Chetwode in one of his final orders, "that Gaza is not strongly held, and it is therefore intended to push the attack with great vigour." Ryrie, believing in his guides, went on boldly.

Throughout the campaign the 7th Light Horse Regiment was noted for its dashing screen-work, and this morning gave officers and men many opportunities of showing their quality. Soon after 6 o'clock, when the fog had lifted and the screen was near Sheikh Abbas, an enemy patrol opened fire on the scattered horsemen. Without hesitation the Australians charged the Turks at the gallop; then a few hundred yards ahead they saw two aeroplanes on the ground and men running round them. The German airmen and mechanics had been awakened by the firing, and had made a rush to start their engines. As the light horsemen galloped up, the machines began to "taxi" across the ground; both escaped, and the pilots, turning almost immediately, returned and machine-gunned the column. One squadron from each regiment was dismounted, and the light horsemen opened on the airmen with their rifles. The only mishap was that Ryrie

² Capt H. O. C. Maddrell, 7th L.H. Regt. Gazier; b. Braidwood, N.S.W., 12 Nov., 1888. Died, 24 March, 1930.

temporarily lost two fine chargers, which, startled by the aeroplanes, broke away from their groom and galloped into Gaza. But such are the accidents of war, that, many hours later, when Gaza was still uncaptured, some Turks were taken prisoner with the two horses in their possession.

Meanwhile the pace of the brigade had been quickened. The squadrons of the 7th, trotting and cantering over a wide front, were now in constant touch with small bodies of the enemy. Every show of resistance on the open country and in the olive-groves was resolutely galloped. The Turks, most of them just rising from their night's sleep, were bewildered with surprise and entirely without preparations for action against this force of wildly-shouting horsemen. As the Australians crossed the Gaza-Beersheba road, they cut the wires between the two centres. At about this time Major F. G. Newton,^a with a squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, galloped down a convoy of ten waggons and shot the horses. Another party rushed and captured thirty German pioneers, with a quantity of pack-gear. These fellows at once became very sulky, and refused to march at the double until the light horsemen began ominously to fix bayonets.

As the sun came up over the dark ranges of Judæa, it discovered the Australians extremely happy and excited in their adventure. They were now many miles deep into the enemy territory, a long, slight, swiftly-moving column, ignorant as yet whether the other mounted brigades and the infantry had succeeded in penetrating the fog, but, in the excitement of the morning's sport, as careless as they were ignorant. Troopers on the Gaza side of the column chased several little parties of startled Turks up to the outskirts of the town; but bigger game was now to fall into the net. Nothing could have disclosed more completely the surprise of the enemy than the fact that in the early morning a Turkish divisional commander and his staff officers, attended by a small mounted patrol, were jogging along in a number of gharries towards Gaza on the road from Deir Sineid. The general, as he afterwards explained, was proceeding to take over the command of the Gaza garrison, and believed that the British were still some-

^a Lieut.-Col. F. G. Newton, C.B.E., D.S.O., A.A.G., A.I.F. in Egypt, 1917/19
Grazier, of Bendee, Stanthorpe, Q'land; b. Redland Bay, Q'land, 5 Oct., 1877.

where about Khan Yunis. As he sat back in his gharry, enjoying the keen morning air, he was startled by a wild whoop and the noise of galloping hoofs, and in a moment was surrounded by a body of grinning, unkempt Australians on their great steaming horses. His mounted patrol drove in their spurs and fled, followed by the Australian troop-leader, shooting with his revolver, and by most of his men.

But three or four of the light horsemen sat on their horses and, moved by the comedy of the situation, laughed aloud at the little Turkish general. Greatly flustered, the Turk—who possibly believed the crude stories of horrible cruelty inflicted by the Australians on their prisoners, which were circulated among the Ottoman troops by the crafty Germans—nervously produced a gold cigarette-case and offered a smoke to the troopers. Not to be outdone in courtesy, an impudent, harum-scarum New South Wales boy produced from his breeches-pocket a half-smoked issue “fag,” and solemnly handed it to the general. Later in the morning, when the distinguished prisoner was taken before Ryrie, he complained bitterly of the indignity he had suffered in being laughed at by common soldiers. Ryrie, with his ready sense of humour, was perhaps not so sympathetic as the circumstance demanded. “Well,” he said, in his big hearty voice, “you must admit it was damned funny.” Passed on to the headquarters of Anzac Mounted Division later in the day, the Turk still protested against his treatment, and insisted to Chauvel that he should be escorted to the rear by an officer of his own rank. Chauvel told him that he was the only British divisional commander east of Gaza, and he feared he could not at that time do himself the honour, nor could he spare one of his very busy brigadiers. The Turk, much disgusted with Australia’s sense of courtesy, went off under the escort of an officer of lower grade.

The 7th Regiment, having secured the roads leading north and east from Gaza, was re-assembled and led by Onslow as far as the sand-dunes towards the sea, thus practically completing the cordon round the town. The mounted troops, aided by the darkness and the fog, had carried out their appointed task. Gaza was encircled, and the success or failure of the day now rested with the infantry of the 53rd Division.

Ryrie established his headquarters at a knoll which was afterwards known as "Australia Hill," and his line from then until after 4 o'clock ran for three miles west through olive- and orange-groves towards the coast. Part of the 6th Light Horse Regiment was pushed north-east as far as Deir Sineid to watch for enemy reinforcements, in which work it was supported late in the day by Lieutenant McKenzie, with the 7th Light Car Patrol. The New Zealand Brigade, following closely after Ryrie, came into position on the left of the Australians, and two squadrons of the Auckland Regiment were sent in the direction of Huj to watch for the enemy. The 22nd Yeomanry Brigade was to the south of the New Zealanders. General Chauvel had his headquarters on a knoll near Beit Durdis.

Meanwhile good progress had been made by the Imperial Mounted Division and the Camel Brigade; and, although Hodgson's command was for a time delayed by the fog, all the mounted troops were in position by 10 o'clock. The Imperial Mounted Division, with headquarters near Khurbet er Reseim, took up a position of observation extending from near Huj, where touch was made with the Auckland squadrons, to the Gaza-Beersheba road, and thence the Camel Brigade carried the line to the Ghuzze at Tel el Jemmi. Hodgson, and Smith of the Camels, now pushed out patrols, and had the enemy under close observation at all points for several miles. British airmen were also flying low over the surrounding country, so that Chetwode was safeguarded against a surprise attack. Touch with the enemy was made early near Huj by two squadrons of yeomanry, which were in action all day. One troop of twenty-five men charged a large batch of Turks in the open with their swords, and took sixty-seven prisoners. Chetwode had thus completed his outer circle; and, although his second line, facing enemy reinforcements to the east and north-east, was extended and thin, it was highly mobile. Swift concentration at threatened points was assured, and the infantry moving on Gaza had at least some hours' security from an attack on its right flank or rear. The function of the mounted troops was to keep the ring for the infantry; and when the horsemen and Camels had closed all roads out from Gaza, and were in position against any Turkish

relieving columns which might attempt to march in, they waited anxiously for the sound of the attack of the 53rd Division.

The story of the First Battle of Gaza is the story of a fog. Major-General Dallas had orders to march with the 53rd Division from his camp near Belah in the dark, and to be "in a position to throw a strong bridgehead across the Wady Ghuzze by 5 o'clock in the neighbourhood of El Breij, and seize the high ground Mansura-El Sheluf," and to "attack Ali Muntar as soon as he can complete his reconnaissance, registration, and other arrangements." The Mansura and El Sheluf Ridges were detached features, lying, Mansura on the right and El Sheluf on the left, of the El Sire Ridge, about 3,000 yards south of Gaza. Dallas was therefore to cross the wady as rapidly as possible, and march without loss of time on his objective. It was hoped that his brigades would be launched on their assault by 8 o'clock in the morning, if not before. But the artillery was first to bombard Ali Muntar and the strong positions to its north and south, although, owing to the limited supply of ammunition, this bombardment was to be brief. The 53rd Division was supported by only two brigades of 18-pounders, and a section of 60-pounders. One infantry battalion and two mounted yeomanry squadrons, supported by a section of 60-pounders, under Lieutenant-Colonel Money, was to demonstrate against the enemy line west of Gaza towards the sea, so as to hold the Turks in the trenches there while the main British force was flung at Ali Muntar.

The 53rd Division reached the crossing at El Breij, and before dawn had thrown forward strong bodies to the east bank to guard the bridge-heads. The 158th Brigade was on the right directed on Mansura; the 160th on the left marched on El Sheluf, with the 159th in reserve. As the battalions floundered over the rough crossing of the wady shortly before dawn, the dense fog settled upon them. It was only about six miles from El Breij to the Turkish defences at Ali Muntar, and the route, although broken near the wady, was across open rolling plains and bare, low ridges, and offered no obstacles to a vigorous approach. But for the fog Dallas's brigades might easily have reached their

points of attack by 8 o'clock; under really active leadership they might have done so even with the handicap of the fog. The situation with the fog, however, was one calculated to delay the average commander. Dallas had in his approach to wheel his division from the right; and to carry out this movement within range of enemy guns, on country of which very little was known in detail, in a dense fog and semi-darkness, was one calling for conspicuous resolution. The attack was, moreover, to be preceded by a bombardment, which was impossible until the light improved. Dallas feared that, when the fog lifted, his brigades might find themselves under heavy fire from the Turks before his artillery could register its targets and come into action. At the same time—again owing to the darkness and the fog—there was some confusion among the brigades after their crossing, and the British commander decided to wait near the wady until the fog had cleared. He therefore held up his division for nearly two hours.

Meanwhile Anzac Mounted Division, advancing surely and rapidly despite the fog, had thoroughly aroused the enemy garrison. The delay at the wady had cost Dallas his opportunity of a surprise assault. When the infantry did move, the brigades made good progress; by 8 o'clock the 160th had reached El Sheluf, and half-an-hour later the 158th was in possession of the high ground at Mansura. The enemy wisely withheld his fire, and it was not until much later, when the leading battalions were within easy range of Ali Muntar, that he disclosed his resistance. At 9 o'clock Dallas conferred with his advanced leaders at Mansura, and decided upon his plan of action.

The delay at the crossing was unfortunate, but the brigades were now so near their objective that, with energetic action, it should not have proved fatal to the day's undertaking. The loss of time at the wady, however, was only the beginning of a waste of opportunities which was continued for some hours, and has never been satisfactorily explained. As the brigades advanced from the wady, the fog had lifted, although for another hour the indefinite light still made effective shooting impossible; in consequence Dallas had ordered his brigadiers to move slowly, as artillery support

would be difficult if the mist suddenly cleared. But by 8 o'clock the light was good, and the batteries had crossed the wady hours before; but no attempt was made to bring them into action until 9 o'clock. Chetwode and Dobell, who had their headquarters together at El Breij, were impatiently waiting for the attack by the 53rd to develop; at 9.30 Chetwode sent a message to Dallas, urging him to "push his attack vigorously." But Dallas about this time had gone forward with his staff to the headquarters of one of his brigades, and for over two hours his own headquarters were deserted by all his staff officers. A little after 9 o'clock a cloud of dust was reported to be moving on the Beersheba road towards Sheria, and this added to Chetwode's anxiety. An hour later his chief of staff again urged Dallas to speed up his advance. "The General Officer Commanding," ran the message, "wishes me to press on you the extreme importance of the capture of Gaza before reinforcements can reach it. Heavy clouds of dust on road from Sheria." At about the same time reports from deserters and aircraft reconnaissance roughly confirmed the British estimate of the strength of the Gaza garrison.

At 11.30 the 53rd Division was still practically stationary, and Chetwode's chief of staff sent the following message to Dallas:—"I am directed to observe that (1) you have been out of touch with Desert Column and your own headquarters for over two hours; (2) no gun registration appears to have been carried out; (3) that time is passing, and that you are still far from your objective; (4) that the Army and Column Commanders are exercised at the loss of time, which is vital; (5) you must keep a general staff officer at your headquarters who can communicate with you immediately; (6) you must launch your attack forthwith."

Still another hour passed without movement by the 53rd Division. Chetwode at 12 o'clock again addressed himself sharply to Dallas, "No message from you for two hours. When are you going to begin your attack? Time is of vital importance. No general staff officer at your headquarters for two hours."

The dust on the Sheria road proved to be a number of waggons travelling away from Gaza. But half the daylight

available for the operation had now slipped away, and the 53rd Division had not closed in on the enemy. Dallas's brigades were already about five hours behind time. He had been promised the support of the 161st Brigade of the 54th Division, which had crossed the wady at El Breij, and also a brigade of that division's 18-pounders. Just before 12 o'clock he asked Desert Column, "Where are infantry brigade and field artillery brigade which are to come to my support if required? I should like them at Mansura now, as I am not sure what the enemy strength is." It was now clear to Chetwode that, if the 53rd Division should meet with serious resistance, it would be unable to reach Gaza before nightfall. With the exception of the regiment of the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, which was engaged with the enemy to the south-west of Huj, neither the Imperial Mounted Division nor the Camel Brigade had yet been seriously approached by enemy reinforcements, and the British airmen reported at midday that there was no sign of enemy movement from any direction.

At 12 o'clock, therefore, Chetwode instructed the two mounted divisions "to reconnoitre immediately, with a view to closing in on the enemy at Gaza to assist the infantry if ordered." At 1 o'clock it was definitely decided to use the horsemen in a dismounted attack upon the town. Chauvel was placed in command of the two mounted divisions. Hodgson was ordered to take over the line occupied during the morning by Anzac Mounted Division, so as to enable Chauvel to push forward his three brigades towards the town, and also to relieve the Anzac patrols at Huj, Nejed, and Deir Sineid. The Camel Brigade was ordered to move to the position vacated by Hodgson at Khurbet er Reseim, and watch the whole area between Huj and Khurbet el Aseferiyeh. At about 1 o'clock the 161st Infantry Brigade, together with the artillery brigade promised to Dallas, was ordered to Mansura Ridge. Although the brigade had only about three and a half miles of level ground to cover, it had not reached Mansura Ridge at 2.30, more than two and a half hours after Dallas asked for it.

A few minutes before 12 o'clock the 158th and 160th Brigades moved from the position in which they had been since



TURKISH AND GERMAN SOLDIERS (GUARDED BY AUSTRALIANS AFTER
 CAPTURE).

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B75



TURKISH SOLDIERS (AFTER CAPTURE)

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B361.

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A CACTUS HEDGE AT GAZA, WITH ARAB CULTIVATOR

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1487

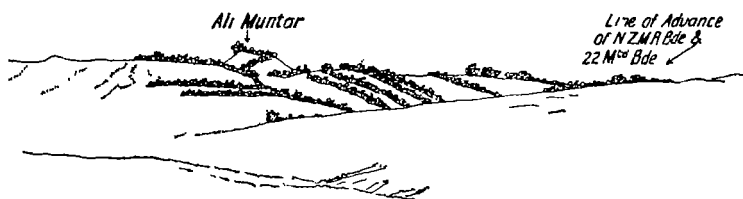
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early morning to the attack on Gaza. The advance of the 158th on the right lay over a naked plain, while the 160th moved north along the almost equally exposed El Sire Ridge. They had upwards of 4,000 yards to travel against an enemy in a high situation and absolutely concealed in earthworks and cactus hedges; and the many Australians and New Zealanders of the mounted regiments who watched the attack appreciated for the first time in the war the splendid steadiness of British infantry and the fine quality of its regimental leadership under the most galling conditions. The long, regular lines, extended in open formation, soon became a good target for the enemy's guns; but they pressed on unshaken for nearly two miles. Up to this stage scarcely a shot had been fired by the Turkish riflemen or machine-gunners, and it was not even certain that Ali Muntar was held in strength. But when the infantry came within about 1,000 yards of the knoll and its cactus entanglements to the north and south, the silence of the ridge was broken by a fierce outburst of rapid rifle-fire and the sinister voice of many machine-guns. Exposed on the plain to the east and the bare slopes in the south, the British lines immediately showed many gaps, and the enemy artillery, bursting with great accuracy, added heavily to the losses. But the battalions, changing their tactics to a series of rushes, and very gallantly led by platoon and company officers, struggled gamely on under deadly punishment.

Unfortunately the 18-pounder batteries which supported the infantry were making very poor practice; many of their shells were passing right over the Ali Muntar position and falling into a cemetery to the north-east of the town, which was not occupied by enemy troops or batteries. This was at once reported by the airmen, but a long time passed before the range was corrected. Communications and response to intelligence were throughout the engagement exceedingly faulty and slow.

Soon after 1 o'clock General Dallas, now recognising the seriousness of his task, threw in the 159th Brigade, which had been in reserve; and the battalions, swinging round the right of the 158th, attacked Ali Muntar from the north-east, and endeavoured to roll up the enemy's left flank. By some lamentable failure in staff work—the day was full of them—

the 201st Artillery Brigade of the 54th Division did not open fire against Ali Muntar until 3 o'clock, three hours after Dallas had asked for it. At 1 o'clock some of the battalions were within a few hundred yards of Ali Muntar; but the intensity of the enemy's fire, which was suffering practically no embarrassment from the British artillery, made it difficult to build up a line for the final assault. As the fight developed, it was discovered not only that Ali Muntar was strongly held, but that the positions on either side of the hill were equally difficult to approach. A maze of little cactus fields, afterwards known as the "Labyrinth," about 1,000 yards to the south of Ali Muntar, was entered by the 160th Brigade at 3 o'clock. This brought the infantry under shelter of the cactus hedges, but progress in the maze proved slow, for the men had to hack their way through the cactus with their bayonets under point-blank fire from the Turks. It was very difficult to keep touch; every hedge contained snipers; and the British were constantly enfiladed. Almost due west of Ali Muntar a flat



Infantry advancing on Ali Muntar at 1st Battle of Gaza, 26th March, 1917.

green knob (afterwards known as "Green Hill") was occupied by a large body of Turks, who poured in a devastating enfilade fire against the left flank of the 158th Brigade. Shortly before 4 o'clock Dallas, now wide-awake to the critical nature of the struggle, gave orders that this hill should be assaulted by three battalions of the 161st Brigade of the 54th Division, which now for the first time came into action; no attempt was made to bring up the remaining two brigades of the 54th Division. Dallas had now committed all his troops; his casualties had been severe; his men were exhausted, and the sun was low down over the Mediterranean.

This attack of the 161st Brigade was launched at 4.20

and after complicated and bloody fighting through the hedges the hill was occupied. At about the same time the 159th, on the right flank, gained a cactus-covered hill north-east of Ali Muntar. The main knoll was then brought under intensive cross-fire, but it was not until just before dusk that it was carried. Still, the enemy, although he was now being driven off the heights of his main position, had, thanks to the hedges, withdrawn in good order, and was still fighting strongly. His casualties had been light; and Dallas, with his brigades spent, reduced, and disorganised, was not yet in a position to exploit the belated success.

At 1 o'clock Chauvel received orders to take over the command of Imperial Mounted Division, and to be in readiness to advance upon the town. But, before the attack could be launched, extensive changes had to be made in the dispositions of the two divisions and the Camel Brigade. His first step was to extend the line of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade westward across the sand-hills to the sea, and the 7th Light Horse Regiment reached the beach early in the afternoon. Soon after 1 o'clock Chetwode gave him a definite order for the attack, and added that the matter was urgent. There was little or no prospect that the extended squadrons of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade would be able to keep touch, owing to the great length of the front and the complicated nature of the country. But both the Australians and the New Zealanders received their orders with light hearts. After their glorious morning gallop they had been for some hours almost entirely idle, and they had evidence that Tala Bey had withdrawn most of his troops from their front to resist the onslaught of the infantry. Only once had the enemy moved in their direction. Soon after noon a battalion of infantry, marching in close formation along a road through the cactus hedges to the north-east of Gaza, came within 800 yards of a troop of the 5th Light Horse Regiment supported by machine-guns. The gunners opened upon them, and inflicted very heavy casualties before the Turks could get to cover. The battalion was completely broken up.

At about 3 o'clock Chauvel removed his headquarters to a hill near Jebalie, and completed his arrangements for the advance. Chetwode, who saw his opportunity vanishing

again, urged Chauvel to launch his attack as soon as possible. "The success of the operation at Gaza," he wired, "depends largely on the vigour of your attack. It is imperative that the position should be ours before dark." But it was not until 4 o'clock that the brigades were ready to move. When the advance began, the line of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade extended from Jebalie for three miles almost due west to the sea; the New Zealanders were along Anzac Ridge, from a point east of Jebalie to a point due east of the town; the 22nd Mounted Brigade was between the New Zealanders and the right flank of the infantry attacking north of Ali Muntar. Everywhere, and especially on the 2nd Light Horse Brigade sector, on which only the 5th and 7th Regiments were engaged, the line was very thin.

For a time the opposition was slight, and some Australian squadrons rode forward at the canter. A squadron of the 5th, under Major W. Chatham, with bayonets fixed, galloped down the Jaffa-Gaza road towards an olive-grove, closely followed by a squadron under Major Newton. Before they reached the shelter of the olive trees, heavy fire was opened on them from the cactus hedges and native villages on their right. Most of the troops then dismounted and swung to the right in the direction of the enemy fire. Fine work was done in covering their advance by the machine-gun squadron of the 2nd Brigade, under Captain J. R. Cain,⁴ which, operating at the end of the line, again and again packed its guns on to the horses, and trotting forward, was able to enfilade the opposing Turks. The squadrons were quickly engaged at close quarters among the cactus hedges, through which gaps had to be cut with the bayonet while under fire from Turks a few feet away on the other side. One troop under Lieutenant F. M. Waite kept to their horses, jumped a number of hedges, and charged several Turkish parties. Waite shot many of the enemy with his revolver, and continued fighting until he had been three times wounded. Meanwhile Major A. G. Bolingbroke advanced dismounted with two troops of the third squadron of the 5th (which had been operating with the 7th Regiment towards the beach) on a raid against a

⁴ Maj. J. R. Cain, M.C. Commanded 2nd Aust. M.G. Sqdn., 1917/19. Clerk; of Goondiwindi, Queensland; b. Mount Gambier, S. Aust., 18 Sept., 1885.

Turkish artillery observation-post at Sheikh Redwan, a knoll to the north-west of the town. He surprised and captured the observing party, and stayed in the position until he was strongly counter-attacked by a Turkish force with machine-guns at close range, when he rejoined his regiment. Throughout the fight this dashing Queenslander led his men with splendid daring. At one stage he reached a thick hedge with a Turkish trench on the other side, and Australians and Turks blazed at each other through the cactus. Bolingbroke then ordered gaps to be cut with the bayonets, led his men through, and shot several men with his revolver; the rest were killed with the steel.

The advance of the 5th Regiment continued with the greatest spirit. The Turks, taken by surprise at an attack from the north so late in the day, offered only piecemeal opposition. In the maze of the cactus there was much snap-shooting. "The Turks," said one of the officers afterwards, "ran in and out like rabbits, and we shot them as they ran." One old farrier-sergeant, who had joined in the charge, was finally cornered in a field with impassable cactus ahead of him; and while his horse nibbled at the grass, he continued sniping over the hedges from the saddle. "Why not get off?" a passing officer asked him. "I can see them better from here," he answered, and went on with his shooting.

On the right the advance of the 7th had been equally fine. The light horsemen knew it was a gamble against the approaching darkness, and, admirably led by their officers, went with all their heart and soul for the town. Perhaps it was that Gaza, with its towers and minarets and white houses showing clear on the hill above the dark plantations, seemed, after the wilderness of Sinai and the hovels of the coastal villages from El Arish to Belah, a civilised place greatly worth winning. But whether it was the seeming richness of the prize (which in reality was as squalid as any of the filthy native villages) or the joy of the rush, or a simple sense of duty, the men, laughing and jesting as they went, dashed on with a fiery impulse which, had it been allowed to continue, promised speedily to overrun the town. When night fell the pale light of a moon in its first quarter relieved the darkness; and the troops and squadrons, maintaining a rough touch by

means of whistles and lamps, pressed on through a number of native villages to the very threshold of Gaza.

The advance through gaps cut with bayonets in the cactus had to be made in single file. Lieutenant H. I. Wikner,⁵ a troop-leader of the 7th known to his men as "Uncle Henry," pressing at the head of his troop through one of these holes, found himself alone in a tiny field surrounded by Turks. He levelled his revolver and called on his men, and, as they scrambled through with their bayonets already blooded, twenty-three Turks surrendered. "Uncle Henry gave his war-whoop," said one of the troopers afterwards, "and we all sailed in." Turks and Australians had now become very mixed, and, as the town was approached, the fight went out of the enemy. Even men with led horses had pushed as far as they could through the hedges after the riflemen, and one party of these shot a number of Turks and took twenty prisoners.

The New Zealanders galloped in from the east across Anzac Ridge to a point slightly south of Jebalie, dismounted, and pressed down the ridge towards Gaza. The Wellington Regiment was on the right, the Canterburys on the left bearing towards Ali Muntar, and the Aucklands in support. As the riflemen advanced, the two regiments came under hot fire from cactus hedges in the valley between them and Gaza, and were also enfiladed from Ali Muntar. Progress was impeded by scattered hedges; but the ground was more open than that in front of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, and the New Zealanders pressed on in good formation. Like the Australians, they knew it was a fight against time, and all ranks were eager to get to close quarters before dark. Most of the fighting fell to the Wellingtons, who were at grips with the Turks less than half-an-hour after the brigade received the orders to advance. They overran an ambulance station, and captured four officers and 125 other ranks, twenty vehicles, and a quantity of other material. The enemy opposed the advance with shrapnel and rifle-fire, but his shooting was indifferent, and the attack went briskly through an olive-grove up to the cactus enclosures near the town. Here, as the Wellingtons hacked

⁵ Lieut.-Col. H. I. Wikner, 7th L.H. Regt. Accountant; of Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Tamworth, N.S.W., 11 Dec., 1880.

their way through the hedges with their bayonets, they were checked by fire from a shallow trench on the further side of a small lagoon; but two troops under Lieutenants Allison⁶ and Foley⁷ rushed the position. Some of the Turks raised their hands as the New Zealanders closed upon them, but most of them resisted, and thirty-two were killed with the bayonet.

Further to the right two 77-mm. Krupp guns in action were located on the edge of the town, and Major Sommerville⁸ with his squadron was ordered to attack. The swoop of the New Zealanders was irresistible; forty-six Turks were bayoneted about the guns, and twenty more captured. The enemy then opened rifle and machine-gun fire on Sommerville's squadron from a house only seventy-five yards away; at the same time a considerable force advanced in a counter-attack. Fortunately this body was observed by Lieutenant Snow,⁹ of the 7th Light Horse, who was on the right; he ran into the open with a Hotchkiss gun, placed it over the shoulder of one of his troopers, and shot down many of the enemy at short range.

The New Zealanders then dispersed the rest of the party with rifle-fire, and, joined by some of the Australians, turned one of the captured guns on to the house occupied by the enemy machine-gun party. Sighting the piece through the open barrel, they loaded and fired two shots into the building. A great number of Turks were killed, and twenty more came out in a dazed state and surrendered. Teams were then improvised and brought up, and the guns were pulled back to brigade headquarters. In these two little bayonet encounters the Wellingtons had only one man killed and four officers and fifteen other ranks wounded.

On the left two squadrons of the Canterburys closed on the town with the Wellingtons, while the third squadron pushed along the ridge to the south. This squadron, anticipating the advance of the 22nd Yeomanry Brigade, joined up with the right of Dallas's infantry, and the two forces reached

⁶ Lieut C H M. Allison, Wellington Mtd. Rifles. Law clerk, of Manaia, N Z; b. Kapuni, Taranaki, N Z, 19 Aug., 1890. Died of wounds, 9 Dec., 1917.

⁷ Capt W R. Foley, M C Wellington Mtd Rifles. Farmer; of Omata, Taranaki, N Z; b. Palmerston North, N Z., 25 Nov., 1888.

⁸ Maj J A. Sommerville, D S O Wellington Mtd. Rifles. Farmer; of Taikapu, Wellington District, N Z; b. Fairview, Wanganui, N Z, 23 Jan., 1882.

⁹ Lieut G Snow, 7th L.H. Regt. Engine-driver; b. Richmond, Melb, Vic., 2 Oct., 1887.

the sheikh's tomb, on the height of Ali Muntar, simultaneously at 6.40. The honour, however, was all to the infantry. There was no fighting on the summit, the Turks having withdrawn as the British closed in.

The position, then, was that the troops of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealand Brigade were entering Gaza from the north and east, while the infantry had carried the key of the enemy's main defences at Ali Muntar, as well as the maze of cactus and trenches on its immediate south and south-west. In other words, the Turk had been jolted from his front line on the east and south-east by the fine sustained fighting of the 53rd Division, and the Anzacs were among his gun-positions behind. But at about 6 o'clock General Dobell, after full consultation with Chetwode and Chauvel, and against the strong protest of the Australian leader, decided to break off the engagement and make a general withdrawal.

The message to withdraw reached Rylie and Chaytor at about 6.20, some twenty minutes before the infantry and Canterburys gained Ali Muntar. To the Australian and New Zealand leaders the order seemed at that stage incredible. Their regiments had made a great advance into the very base of the enemy's strength, had found the Turks demoralised and disinclined to fight, and had suffered practically no casualties. Even in the failing light they had not the least fear as to continuing their advance, since every indication pointed to a rout and general surrender at any moment. Chaytor expressed his opinion of the order by exercising his right to have it sent to him in writing before he acted upon it; and Rylie, conscious that if it was immediately obeyed he must leave behind and sacrifice a large number of his widely scattered men, bluntly told his staff officers that there was to be no withdrawal until every trooper had been collected. "Not a man is to be left behind." As the order was slowly communicated from brigade to regiment, and on to the distant squadrons and troops, it was everywhere received first with doubt and then with disgust. Again and again the astonished and puzzled officers ordered their signallers to have it repeated; and, when its truth was beyond question, they felt as men could only feel who were ordered to accept defeat, when in

their opinion the battle was won and the objective actually in their hands.

But if the order to withdraw was bitter to the Anzac brigades, it was still more bitter to General Dallas and the brigadiers and regimental officers of the 53rd Division. If the 53rd Division had failed in not pressing on through the fog, and if, owing to some unaccountable reason, there had been a most unfortunate delay in advancing to the attack after the brigades reached Mansura and El Sheluf, the work after their belated beginning at noon had upheld the finest traditions of British infantry. Advancing over bare plain and ridge against galling opposition, and supported by very poor shooting on the part of their artillery, much of which did not come into effective action, all battalions had shown a complete carelessness of life and a high resolve to carry the position. Some time before the actual order to the mounted troops was given, Dallas had known that withdrawal had been decided upon if the enemy did not collapse before dark. Chetwode and Chauvel had been fully aware of the risk that was taken when three of the mounted brigades were withdrawn from positions in which they were watching for enemy reinforcements, and thrown against the town. During the afternoon the aeroplanes and cavalry patrols had reported increased Turkish activity in the surrounding country. At 4 o'clock, as the mounted attack was being launched, 300 Turkish infantrymen were seen advancing in the neighbourhood of Deir Sineid, and a force of enemy cavalry was observed on the Hareira road about five miles from Gaza. Shortly before 5 o'clock 3,000 infantry and two squadrons of cavalry were noticed moving south-west from Huj, and a little later four converging columns of infantry, to the number of about 7,000, were reported marching from the direction of Hareira.

"Towards sunset," said Dallas, in his subsequent report upon the operation, "to the best of my recollection, General Chauvel pointed out that my right was in the air, and that he could give me no protection during the night." Chetwode had then pointed out the gap between Dallas's right and the left flank of the 54th Division, and had ordered Dallas to draw back his exposed flank and join up with the 54th. But Dallas, like Chaytor and Ryrie, found it hard to accept defeat

when, as he believed, Gaza was won. "I explained," he said, "that it was quite impossible to do this without abandoning the positions the division had taken, and urged that other troops might be sent to fill the gap, and that I might be allowed to hold the position gained. I asked for time to consider. Finally I received definite instructions that I must swing back my right and get in touch with the 54th Division."

While, therefore, the New Zealanders and the 2nd Light Horse Brigade were collecting their men, and preparing for the march out from the north and north-east of the town, Dallas's brigades were withdrawn from the stronghold for which they had paid so great a price in endeavour and life. The 54th Division closed in about two miles, and joined up with Dallas's withdrawn right flank, and the blood-stained battleground around Ali Muntar was for some hours a No-Man's Land.

The march back of the mounted brigades from Gaza was one of the sorriest movements undertaken by Australians and New Zealanders during the war. When the order to break off was received by the 7th Light Horse Regiment, on the extreme right, Onslow concentrated his men upon the beach. Ryrie stood firmly to his declaration that he would not move as long as a single man was unaccounted for. The state of the Turks was shown by the fact that nowhere did they make any effort to follow the retiring light horsemen. But, even without any activity on their part, the squadrons had, in the dark, for the moon had now set, the greatest difficulty in collecting their men. Happily the casualties had been light, and there was very little trouble in their transport. The 2nd Brigade had only one man killed and five wounded, and the New Zealand Brigade only two men killed and four officers and twenty-five men of other ranks wounded.

It was nearly midnight before the 2nd Brigade was assembled. With Ryrie's regiments as rear-guard, the Anzac Mounted Division marched, by a long circuitous route, to the east of the two infantry divisions, before reaching the Gluzze. So confident were the brigadiers of Chauvel's division that they were in no danger from the enemy, that no precautions were taken against noise or lights, and the course of the column was clearly marked by the striking of

matches as the men lit their pipes and cigarettes. As usual, the men, in the excitement of their advance, had lost all sense of weariness, and had charged with the freshness of perfectly fit athletes. But they were now in their third night without sleep. "As we groped our way back," said one of the squadron leaders, "all ranks were almost comatose from exhaustion." The bodies of the few Anzacs who had been killed were strapped to limbers and carried back to Belah; and so thorough had been the search, that at dawn only one man of the 2nd Brigade was missing—and it was remembered that he had been seen asleep close to the point of re-assembly. Many of the Turkish prisoners straggled and escaped into the darkness, despite the vigilance of their guards. Trooper Tattam,¹⁰ an Australian drover, had thirty Turks in his care. A man of simple mind, but a good soldier, he believed that court-martial awaited him if any of his men escaped, and several times during the night he "tallied" them over, as he had been accustomed to do with his sheep and cattle at home. On one count he was two Turks short; he made up his "mob" to the correct number by picking up two Bedouins.

The infantry battalions of the 53rd Division received the order to withdraw with the same amazement as the mounted troops, and interpreted it to mean that the enemy was pressing in strength from the east and north. In the intense darkness the effect of this impression upon troops exhausted by long fighting, and shaken by heavy casualties, led to some loss of control by their officers. Part of the division withdrew in confusion, and a considerable number of machine-guns and other material were abandoned. Having made touch with the 54th Division, which was entrenched on a line running north of Mansura down the Burjaliye Ridge, Dallas dug in and waited for the dawn. The gap between the right of the 54th Division and the Ghuzze was partly filled by the Camel Brigade; and the Anzac and Imperial Mounted Divisions, crossing the wady during the night and early morning, remained in readiness for action if the Turks should attack the infantry.

The strength of the advancing Turkish reinforcements on the evening of the 26th has, since the engagement, been the

¹⁰ Cpl J. P. Tattam, 7th L.H. Regt. Storekeeper, of Mungindi, N.S.W., b. Wee Waa, N.S.W., 1886

subject of much heated controversy. But the overwhelming opinion of officers who were actually on the watch for the enemy's approach is that a greatly exaggerated view of the menace was taken by Chetwode and Dobell. At 9.30 at night the three main advancing bodies were still several miles from Gaza. One force was crossing the Wady Hesi, at Deir Sineid, eight miles north of the town, where they were opposed by part of the 6th Light Horse Regiment; a larger force was exercising some pressure against the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and the 6th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade at Beit Durdis; while a third column was held up at Khurbet el Baha by the 10th Light Horse Regiment. Some time before nightfall the 6th Yeomanry Brigade had been pressed near Beit Durdis, but, when it was joined by the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, the Turkish advance was stopped. The 5th Yeomanry Brigade had been sent to fill the gap between Beit Durdis and the left flank of the Camels, but had in some way got out of touch, and that gap was subsequently filled and held by the 10th Light Horse Regiment under Todd. Chetwode, in his report, emphasised the prompt and highly efficient work done by the regiments of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade; but the regimental officers of this body are unanimous in the opinion that they were at no time dangerously pressed.

Every brigadier believed that the enemy could have been held without trouble during the night, while the occupation of the town was completed. Ryrie, who was in close touch with his squadrons at Deir Sineid, strongly maintained the opinion that the withdrawal was a blunder. "When we got the order to pull out," he said, "the town was undoubtedly ours. The New Zealanders held ground from which they dominated the whole position, and my men were actually in Gaza." Chetwode, in his report, referring to the time taken in collecting Anzac Mounted Division after the engagement, explains that some of the men were "collecting wounded, &c., in Gaza." The officers of the 6th Light Horse at Deir Sineid stated that, when they were withdrawn, there was no pressure from the enemy on their front. "I was not able to collect my men," said Ryrie, "until nearly midnight, and during that time there were no signs of the enemy, which shows the value of the information that a large force of

Turks, marching to the relief of Gaza, was close upon us." Prisoners taken afterwards said that the Turks were ready to surrender at dawn, and white flags had been distributed for hoisting. Some months later a captured Syrian doctor, who was in Gaza on March 26th, asked Ryrie: "Why did you pull out from Gaza on the first attack?" Ryrie, with characteristic bluntness, replied, "You can damn well search me!" The Syrian added that when Tala Bey (the garrison commander) discovered in the morning that the British had withdrawn, he "laughed for a long time."

The 9th Light Horse Regiment, which was the rear-guard for the 3rd Brigade, remained some miles east of Gaza until 3 o'clock on the morning of the 27th; but though Scott's men were "in the air," they were not troubled by the enemy until they began to retire. Even then the Turks advanced with caution. The regiment had only four men wounded during the night, and the troops took it in turn to cover the retreat, smoked and laughed as they alternately dismounted, used their rifles for a while, and then cantered on. Towards morning the Turks, now sure that the British force was going right back, pressed more vigorously. Royston, who was delaying their advance without becoming actually engaged, was some time after daylight retiring along the track from Sihan to the Ghuzze crossing at Mendur. His brigade there came under considerable shrapnel-fire, and the enemy, recognising that the wady would delay his march, became aggressive and dangerous.

At this time, however, Lieutenant McKenzie came across from the direction of Gaza with five of his cars of the 7th Light Car Patrol. This dashing little unit had spent an exciting night. McKenzie's narrative, as told in his personal diary, supplies a good example of the work of these units. "The mist was very dense," he says, "as, on the morning of the 26th, we approached the Wady Ghuzze, which we crossed at about 9 o'clock. I was leading in my car, followed by the two light armoured batteries and my own patrol. We were shelled from Ali Muntar as we proceeded towards Khurbet Sihan, and one man of the Light Armoured Motor Battery was killed. At 5 o'clock I was sent with my patrol to Deir Sineid, to get into the place, if possible; but I was sent too late in

the day. It was dusk when I reached Sineid, and the place, which was a mass of prickly pear, was full of Turks. A detachment of the 6th Light Horse was in the vicinity, but was unable to get into the village. I retired, and got orders from Anzac Mounted Division to move back across the Ghuzze. It was already dark, and the country was broken with wadys and many pits and wells, although the going was hard. The cars fell into a number of holes, and we had to lift them out. One car smashed an axle. We towed it until that became impossible, and then stripped it and left it. We occasionally came on to odd parties of our horse and Camels groping in the dark. We then struck a wady, which kept heading us off towards the west, till I found myself in a very distinct danger zone, with gun-fire close, and Ali Muntar towering above me. We were so absolutely physically done, that we decided to stay there the night, and make a dash for safety at dawn. All night long our troops were passing back south-east of us.

"At dawn we saw we were in a sticky position if discovered. We slipped out on to the Gaza-Beersheba road, every now and then meeting small parties of British 'lost ones,' whom we directed towards the wady, and then hit up the pace towards Sihan, where we hoped to meet the armoured cars. They were not there. Instead, we found the 3rd Light Horse Brigade retiring before a huge enemy force, who were bearing in heavily on them. General Royston galloped over and asked me if I could cover his retirement. This is just the kind of job we are most suited for. We ran the cars into likely positions along the ridge, and, while the brigade went by, we waited until the enemy came within range. When they were some 1,200 or 1,500 yards off, we opened fire with five machine-guns. It was immense. General Royston was greatly pleased, and he asked if we required a squadron to cover our retreat or to stand by in support. We said, 'No,' so he wished us good luck, and galloped after his brigade. We were now on our own. It was the time of our lives. We placed the cars (never attempting to dismount the guns) in such positions that enemy parties, trying to avoid the fire of one, would come under the fire of another; but we could not stem a force of thousands. They kept advanc-

ing, and we retired from one ridge to another comfortably, while the 3rd Brigade got clear away across the wady, and was secure. We had targets of mounted men and infantry, and killed at least 150 of them, and they must have had very heavy casualties altogether. We suffered no losses.

"When we reached the ridge close upon Mendur, we found General Smith's Camel Brigade making breakfast, in total ignorance of the proximity of the Turks. I reported at once to the brigadier. He almost refused to believe me, and asked me to go out and make sure. I was tickled, because I had been scrapping with those fellows for the past hour; but I went to please him, and the Turks, as soon as I got within three-quarters of a mile of them, lobbed a bunch of shrapnel shells fairly over the cars. How we escaped I don't know. We slid back, and found the brigadier thoroughly satisfied. He was good stuff, and decided to hold on to his corner, which he did all day. . . . When we reached General Chetwode he was greatly relieved to find us safe, as we were long overdue, and he gave me a mighty good lunch of cold beef and tomatoes."

At 10.30 on the night of the 26th, Dobell's wireless operators intercepted the following message from von Kressenstein to Tala Bey, the commander of Gaza:—"Having regard to the disposition of Turkish troops and leaders, can an attack be successful at early dawn? I beg you to do your utmost to hold out so long." Tala Bey immediately replied to von Kressenstein, "Your telegram received. Please attack, at all costs, at 2 o'clock to-night." At the same time Tala sent the following wireless to headquarters, Turkish Expeditionary Force:—"Position lost at 7.45." By "position," Tala Bey meant the main Ali Muntar defences, which had been carried at dark by the 53rd Division. These messages—which confirmed so strongly the opinion of Chauvel, Chaytor, and Rylie, that, when the fight was broken off, the battle was actually won—were not without effect on Dobell. Tala Bey, so far from counter-attacking on the withdrawal of the British force, was, when he sent these messages three or four hours afterwards, under the impression that Gaza was still closely invested, and he apparently believed that it would be rushed with the bayonet at dawn.

Soon after daylight on the 27th, Dallas was ordered to reconnoitre Ali Muntar, and to re-occupy it at once, if it was not held by the enemy. Dallas, with feelings which may easily be imagined, acted promptly. Patrols pushed rapidly up on to Ali Muntar and the other positions evacuated on the previous night; but they had scarcely reached the ground when the Turks advanced against them in force, and drove them off before supports could be sent up. Dallas had now a dangerous salient in his line, which, as the Turks re-occupied their trenches, became exposed to heavy fire. He therefore decided, as a further assault on Ali Muntar could give him no lasting results unless he was substantially reinforced, to reduce this salient by pulling his advanced line back to a point half-way between Ali Muntar and El Sheluf. By this time the Turkish reinforcements from the east had occupied Sheikh Abbas, and from that position began to assail the rear and right flank of the 53rd Division. The engagement had unequivocally failed. During the 27th the enemy threw strong reinforcements into Gaza, and continued to increase his pressure on the 53rd and 54th Divisions, the 22nd Yeomanry Brigade, and the Camel Brigade, all of which remained east of the Wady Ghuzze.

On the night of the 26th, when Smith, with the Camel Brigade, had been ordered to a line running towards the north from Um Jerrar, he had been told that the 54th Division was on his left. But at daylight on the morning of the 27th, he found his flank exposed, and no sign of the infantry. He then slightly withdrew his line to an improved position; but before he moved a German aeroplane had flown over his brigade, and soon afterwards enemy artillery fire opened on the evacuated position, and continued shelling it all day. This was conclusive evidence, if it was needed, that there was even then very little resolution behind the advance of the Turkish reinforcements. But at nightfall the enemy began to close in, and at 9 o'clock Smith received orders to withdraw across the wady. The enemy was within listening distance. The mounting of the Camel Brigade was usually accompanied by "a noise which could be heard all over Asia." But that night the men, in Smith's words, "excelled, first in their withdrawal, and afterwards in the silence in which they got the camels on to their legs and led them out." The with-

drawal of the infantry and the two mounted brigades occupied most of the night, and the infantry bridge-heads were not evacuated until after dawn on the 28th.

"This action," said Dobell, in his report to Murray upon the day's work, "has had the result of bringing the enemy to battle, and he will now undoubtedly stand with all his available force, in order to fight us when we are prepared to attack. It has also given our troops an opportunity of displaying the splendid fighting qualities they possess. So far as all ranks of the troops engaged were concerned, it was a brilliant victory, and had the early part of the day been normal victory would have been secured. Two more hours of daylight would have sufficed to finish the work which the troops so magnificently executed after a period of severe hardship and long marches, and in the face of most stubborn resistance."

This statement will, perhaps, stand as a classic example of the manner in which all commanders are tempted to deceive themselves, or allow themselves to be deceived. But, construe it as Dobell might, this first Gaza engagement was an unqualified failure. The troops had certainly displayed splendid fighting qualities; they had done all the work and taken practically all the ground necessary to gain complete success. From dawn, when the Ghuzze was reached, until dark, when the fight was broken off, the British leadership had been deplorably weak and chaotic. In his despatch to the War Office, Murray, inspired no doubt by Dobell's report, made a strong point of the delay caused by the fog. Certainly the fog delayed the 53rd Division for two hours, and two hours' more daylight in the evening would have given Dobell a very brilliant little victory. But Chetwode, in his very clear and frank report upon the day's work, said shrewdly: "The dense fog which came on just before dawn, and which did not entirely clear until 8 o'clock, while undoubtedly delaying the operations very materially, since the General Officer Commanding 53rd Division did not consider it advisable to advance his infantry till gun support could be counted upon, at the same time gave immunity from gun-fire to my troops during the time they were crossing the wady, and enabled the mounted troops to work forward some distance before their presence was detected."

The fog, in its effect upon the progress of the 53rd Division, was unfortunate, and neither Chetwode nor Dobell could be held responsible for that delay. Higher commands must and should allow their subordinates a substantial measure of discretion. But when the fog cleared, between 7 and 8 o'clock, there still remained ample time for the capture of Gaza. The enterprise failed, not because of the fog, but because of the unaccountable delay after Dallas's brigades had reached Mansura and El Sheluf. These places are not more than 4,000 yards from Ali Muntar, and—as was shown later—the intervening country offers no physical obstacle to a rapid advance. Dallas has been blamed for that delay, and also for the faulty use of his artillery. "Up to a point," says Chetwode's report, "General Dallas's arrangements appear to have been good; but it would appear that the attack of his brigades was not properly synchronised, and consequently that brigades, to a certain extent, went in piecemeal. . . . The 53rd Division attacked and took the position with the greatest gallantry, and the 161st Brigade (of the 54th Division) also behaved admirably. It would appear, however, that, owing to faulty communications, or for some other reason, the infantry at times was not given that artillery support which it should have received, and that at critical periods during the day whole batteries were not shooting at all, being unaware of the requirements of the infantry."

Before 9.30 in the morning, nearly two hours after the brigades of the 53rd reached El Sheluf and Mansura, Chetwode—as is shown by his message to Dallas at that time—was manifestly concerned about the delay which had taken place after the lifting of the fog. From that time until noon he continued to show his anxiety by his repeated urgent messages to Dallas; his subsequent orders to the mounted divisions to close on Gaza made it clear that he was conscious the 53rd Division had failed to carry out his orders. For two hours during the morning Dallas was away from his headquarters and out of range of Chetwode's orders. Yet neither that, nor the fact that the advance, on which the whole day's operations depended, was halted for four hours, appears to have been deemed of sufficient importance to make either Chetwode or Dobell ride forward and definitely order the advance of the

division. Dobell and Chetwode were together all the morning just north of Inseirat, and only a few miles from Dalias.

At 12 o'clock, when he asked for the 161st Brigade, Dallas was "not sure what the enemy's strength was." But he had not at that time, nor until an hour afterwards, advanced his brigades close enough to the enemy position even to draw their fire and test their strength. His orders had been explicit; he was to have advanced on Ali Muntar immediately after crossing the Wady Ghuzze at dawn. In the circumstances, it would appear that only two courses were open to Dobell—either to ride forward himself, or to send Chetwode. It was clear that the operation suffered from a foolish duplication of leaders, the blame for which must rest with Murray. No sound military reason could justify the existence of two commands, Eastern Force and Desert Column, at that time—with the Commander-in-Chief at El Arish also responsible for the conduct of operations.

So much for the delay in the morning after the fog had lifted. The withdrawal at dark was equally unfortunate; and here again the only possible explanation is that it was brought about because the leader or leaders responsible for the orders were too far from the ground of operations. The telephone and telegraph were Dobell's undoing at Gaza. There was no reason why the two British leaders should not, during the day, in one of the cars of the Light Car Patrol, have covered the whole front occupied by the mounted troops; if necessary, they could have done so more than once. It was essentially a fight needing personal observation, which would have ensured in an operation so scattered the co-ordination essential for success. Chetwode, Dobell, and Murray urged in their subsequent reports that the necessity for watering the horses, apart from the advance of the enemy reinforcements, made the withdrawal imperative. Chetwode wrote: "At 6.10 p.m., the majority of my mounted troops having been unable to water their horses during the day, I, with the approval of the General Officer Commanding Eastern Force, instructed General Chauvel to break off the engagement. and retire his divisions west of the Wady Ghuzze." Dobell justified the withdrawal of the mounted divisions in these words: "Very few of the horses had been watered during the day,

and it was necessary to withdraw the mounted divisions for this reason." As a matter of fact, there was a considerable supply of water in the country occupied by the horsemen. Half of the horses of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade were watered without difficulty during the day, and Hodgson had reported to Desert Column at 10 o'clock in the morning that one of his brigades had already watered.

There is on record no message to Desert Column or Eastern Force which expresses any serious apprehension as to the enemy reinforcements. Three columns were, it is true, in sight; but only near Beit Durdis, where the 6th Mounted Brigade was pushed off Hill 405, was the pressure ever strong, and even there the Turks were arrested and firmly held as soon as the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, sent forward by Chauvel, went to the assistance of the yeomanry. Dobell, of course, gave the actual order for the withdrawal; but it is clear from the despatches that Chetwode fully concurred. General Chauvel was opposed to the movement. When Dobell told him over the telephone that it was proposed to withdraw, the Australian leader protested: "But we have Gaza!" Dobell replied: "Yes; but the Turkish reinforcements are all over you." In the day's fighting, 47 British officers and 350 other ranks were killed, 2,900 wounded, and 200 reported missing. Nearly all these casualties were suffered by the infantry.

In itself the engagement was a severe blow to the British Army, since it affected the troops on both sides to a degree out of all proportion to the casualties suffered, or to the negative victory gained by the Turks. There was not a single private in the British infantry, or a trooper in the mounted brigades, who did not believe that failure was due to staff bungling and to nothing else. The men were convinced that, owing to the almost unbelievable folly of the Higher Command, they had been robbed of a victory they had actually gained. On the Turkish side the story of Tala Bey "laughing for a long time" when he discovered on the morning of the 27th that the British had withdrawn during the night, whether it is true or not, expressed the feeling of all ranks. To the Turks and their leaders the saving of Gaza was a miracle of good fortune, a special act of grace by Allah; and it cheered and

fortified the enemy as no ordinary hard-fought victory could possibly have done. But the effect of the failure went much further than that. The fight served to disclose to the enemy the whole British plan of advance, and prompted him to make his dispositions accordingly. Had he ever, as Dobell and Murray believed, contemplated a withdrawal, he would certainly have hurried on his retirement if Gaza had been torn from him. But now, with his troops elated, and with a very low opinion of the quality of the leadership opposed to him, he could have no hesitation about standing on the strong Gaza-Beersheba line.

Worst of all the consequences of this wretched fight was the effect it had upon the minds of General Dobell and Sir Archibald Murray. With their hopes so high before March 26th, the two leaders found it impossible to accept that day's work as destroying their plans for an immediate advance to the north as far at least as the Wady Hesi. Their despatches immediately after the fight show that they had no intention of abandoning their original scheme. They made very light of their tragic failure. Dobell's report has been quoted; Murray's message to the War Office was an equally curious pronouncement. "We have advanced our troops," he cabled, "a distance of fifteen miles from Rafa to the Wady Ghuzze, five miles west of Gaza, to cover the construction of the railway. On the 26th and 27th we were heavily engaged east of Gaza with a force of about 20,000 of the enemy. We inflicted very heavy losses upon him. It is estimated that his losses were between 6,000 and 7,000. We have in addition 900 prisoners, including the General Commanding and the whole of the staff of the 53rd Turkish Division. This figure includes four Austrian officers and thirty-two Austrian and five German other ranks. We captured two Austrian 4.2 howitzers. All troops behaved splendidly, especially the Welsh, Kent, Herefordshires, Middlesex, and Surrey Territorials and Anzac and Yeomanry Mounted troops."

The War Office asked the Commander-in-Chief for further particulars, and Murray replied: "By dusk on March 26th Gaza was enveloped, and the 53rd Division had taken the first line of trenches. The enemy blew up the wireless station (at Gaza), reporting to von Kressenstein that they

must surrender. At 1 o'clock von Kressenstein started relieving columns from Beersheba, Huj, and Sheria, and the 53rd Turkish Division arrived at Mejdal. Our armoured cars and mounted troops, brilliantly led, fought a delaying action against all these support columns, capturing the commander and the staff of the 53rd Turkish Division. Enemy casualties are estimated at over 5,000. Chetwode, to prevent his cavalry being enveloped by the converging Turkish columns, withdrew. . . ." Murray further informed the War Office that the "Camel Corps on 27th nearly annihilated a Turkish cavalry division," and that the enemy's casualties in that engagement were 3,000. He added that "on March 28th the enemy occupied Gaza defences, and would not advance to the attack." The report of Smith's Camel Brigade upon the engagement makes no reference at all to the destruction of a Turkish cavalry division, or to any serious engagement. Murray was apparently misinformed. Concluding his second message to the War Office, Sir Archibald said: "It was a most successful operation, the fog and waterless nature of the country just saving the enemy from complete disaster. It has filled our troops with enthusiasm, and proved conclusively that the enemy has no chance against our troops in the open."

General Murray in his final despatch upon the engagement (dated 28th June, 1917) estimated the Turkish casualties at 8,000, while the British were "under 4,000." Those actually engaged in the fighting were of the opinion that the Turkish losses were light, and less than half those suffered by the British.

CHAPTER XVIII

SECOND GAZA

BOTH Dobell and Murray were clearly determined to put the best possible complexion upon the engagements of March 26th, while they applied themselves to preparing a second attack with all the resources at their command. They aimed at achieving a decisive victory over the Turks in a pitched battle, and by this triumph to smother up the fiasco of March 26th. During this time Dobell repeatedly advised the Commander-in-Chief that the outlook was exceptionally bright, and Murray unfortunately appears to have accepted these assurances without question. At a time when all or nearly all the other generals on the front, including Chetwode and Chauvel, took a very grave view of the gathering Turkish resistance, the Commander-in-Chief and the leader of Eastern Force entered with light hearts upon their preparations.

In the controversy which followed the Gaza fights, Murray's sympathisers have blamed the War Office for urging him to renew his offensive immediately after the failure of March 26th. "It was at this time (the end of March)," writes General Murray in his official despatch of June 28th, "when the hitherto adverse situation in Mesopotamia was rapidly changing in our favour, that the War Cabinet again changed the policy in this theatre. In a telegraphic communication dated March 30th, I was instructed, in view of the altered situation, to make my object the defeat of the Turks south of Jerusalem and the occupation of Jerusalem. I replied, drawing attention once more to my never varying estimate of the troops required, that a rapid advance could not be expected unless I were fortunate enough to inflict a severe blow on the enemy, and that heavy fighting with considerable losses would have to be expected if the Turks held, as I anticipated, a series of strong positions between the Gaza-Beersheba and the Jerusalem-Jaffa lines. After consideration of this reply by the War Cabinet, I was informed that the War Cabinet relied on me to pursue the enemy with all the rapidity compatible with the necessary progress of my communications.

and was anxious that I should push my operations with all energy, though at the same time no additional troops were to be sent to me, since it was considered that, in view of the military situation of the enemy, my present force would suffice. At that time, as always, I had fully appreciated the importance of offensive operations in this theatre, and, having failed to take Gaza by a *coup de main*, I was anxious to take it, if possible, by more deliberate operations before the enemy was further reinforced, chiefly on account of its water-supply. I was therefore ready, as I stated at the time, to attack Gaza with my present force before the end of April, and had good hopes, provided the enemy was not heavily reinforced, of capturing the town."

In consequence of these messages, it has been suggested that the War Office was responsible for the second attack on the Gaza defences. But in fairness to the War Cabinet Murray's cabled reports of the engagement of March 26th must be taken into consideration. Reading the Commander-in-Chief's messages, the Cabinet might very well have taken a cheerful view of the prospect of a second assault. In fact, the statements made by both Murray and Dobell immediately after March 26th might have been specially designed to secure approval, the one from his Commander-in-Chief, and the other from the War Cabinet, for the attack which was made in April. The War Cabinet, believing what it was told, took the only course open to it. The full responsibility for the second attempt on the Gaza-Beersheba defences must rest with Murray and Dobell.

The position early in April was that the Turks had a force of between 20,000 and 25,000 rifles on a sixteen-mile front extending towards Beersheba from the sea west of Gaza. East of Gaza the line, which roughly followed the Gaza-Beersheba road, ran along a low, irregular system of ridges, on which the enemy had been for a long time engaged in digging trenches and constructing redoubts. The approach to this chain of ridges from the south was up long and gentle slopes devoid of either fences or trees. From their entrenchments the Turks had the country for many miles to the south and south-west always under detailed observation, and their fire swept every immediate approach to their lines. Considering

their position in more detail, it was flanked on the north-west by the sea, and then ran across about 4,000 yards of sand-dunes slightly to the south of Gaza, whence it was carried across the face of the town through a maze of cactus hedges on to an elevation known as "Samson's Ridge." It then ran through the Maze, the Labyrinth, and Green Hill to Ali Muntar. Immediately east of Ali Muntar there was a gap about 800 yards wide—bare plain, across which part of the 53rd Division had advanced under destructive fire on March 26th. This gap, known as "Delilah's Neck," the Turks always left practically open, as it was completely dominated by the Ali Muntar defences on the west, and by the beginning of the chain of ridges towards the south-east, along which the line was then continued. A feature of this system of ridges was that it contained a number of rough semi-circles open to the south and south-west, which, with the heights in Turkish hands, brought attacking troops under enfilade-fire as they advanced to close quarters. From Gaza towards Beersheba the formidable redoubts in the system were the "tank" system (as it was afterwards known), Atawineh, Hareira, and Sheria. Two great wadys, the Imleih and the Sheria, with their many bays and tributaries, effectively covered the left flank of the Turkish position.

This line being almost unassailable at the Gaza end, and its flank towards Beersheba being protected by country containing little water except in the rainy season, the enemy was on ground highly favourable in itself for defence, and easy to improve by digging and wiring. Always great workers with their picks and shovels, the Turks laboured strenuously, in the days which followed the British failure of March 26th, to make themselves unassailable; at the same time they brought down every available man, machine-gun, and field-piece from the country as far north as Damascus. Faithfully served by the superior German aircraft, they were fully aware of Dobell's active preparations for another attack. Observation was easy. Dobell's infantry divisions (including the 74th, which had been brought forward from El Arish) and his mounted divisions were in the open around Belah and along the Ghuzze towards the south-east, and concealment was no longer possible. Dobell had still a marked superiority in

numbers. His effective troops probably outnumbered the Turks early in April by at least two to one. Nevertheless a more experienced and less impetuous leader would have paused before coming, as Dobell did, to the decision to avenge the failure of March 26th by an assault with all his strength against the great Turkish stronghold. But Dobell's confidence was boundless, and he found Murray only too willing to accept his estimate of the outlook. "When your next move takes place," Murray wrote to Dobell at this time, "I have every confidence it will be most successful. Every detail for the attack should be worked out before assuming the offensive. All gas preparations should be carefully prepared in case it is necessary to use them, and an overwhelming supply of shells should be at hand. A two days' preliminary bombardment is strongly recommended, even at the risk of the enemy evacuating Gaza, in which case the cavalry must pursue with the greatest vigour." Murray also advised the War Office: "We are in close touch with the enemy, who now occupies a strong position west of Gaza. Preparations are proceeding satisfactorily. With a view to turning the enemy out by deliberate attack, the heavy artillery and tanks have been brought up."

Dobell was even more sanguine than his leader. Both he and Murray placed great confidence in the tanks, of which six were to be employed; and the two generals were so satisfied about the position that they were for some time in doubt as to whether it would be necessary to use gas, although 2,000 gas-shells were now at Belah. Dobell therefore asked the chief of Murray's staff whether the Commander-in-Chief "wished me definitely to use gas-shells except in case of urgent necessity." "Neither the enemy's numbers nor the strength of his positions," Dobell wrote, "are likely to force the necessity upon me, so far as I can judge." He added that he was uninfluenced by any doubt whatever as to the ability of his force "to defeat the enemy in front of me." He was not in the dark about the strength of the Turkish positions, for he pointed out to Murray that "the whole of the cup, of which the line El Sire-Mansura-Sheikh Abbas-Sharta-Um Jerrar is the rim, is under artillery fire from the position of the enemy, who has admirable observation all over it from Ali Muntar

and its neighbourhood." But despite that, he was convinced of his "very favourable situation in comparison with the enemy, as regards armament and equipment." Meanwhile the engineers were busy developing water-supply at Belah and in the Wady Ghuzze, where a good source was discovered at a depth of twenty-two feet. At Um Jerrar a number of large empty cisterns were discovered, and camel-trains operating by night were employed to fill these with water; an advanced base of 67,000 gallons was established there for the use of the infantry when they moved forward. The British airmen, both of the land forces and the Royal Naval Air Service, were active in reconnaissance over all the country as far north as Beisan, south of the Sea of Galilee, where "the very bright railway lines" told their story of great activity along the Turkish line of communications. On the night of April 8th 1,400 pounds of explosives were dropped on the German aerodrome at Ramleh, some sixty miles north of Belah, and three direct hits were obtained on hangars.

The scruple about the use of gas is difficult to understand after the shells had been brought all the way from England to Belah. Perhaps Murray hesitated about being the first to introduce the terrible new weapon on a front where it had been until then a stranger; but towards the middle of April, when even Dobell became impressed by the rapid growth of the Turkish forces and defences, its employment was definitely decided upon. Murray personally presided at a conference attended by Dobell, Chetwode, and the divisional commanders, at which the final plans for the attack were adopted; after explaining his scheme he concluded by emphasising the significance of his two additional weapons, the gas-shells and the tanks.

Dobell's plan was simple. The infantry divisions were to crush the enemy on his main position around Gaza, while the mounted divisions pressed back his flank towards Beersheba, prevented the withdrawal of reinforcements from there to Gaza, and held themselves in readiness for the pursuit. In the infantry attack the 52nd Division was to assault Ali Muntar and its surrounding defences, while the 54th, crossing the Gaza-Beersheba road on the right of the 52nd, was to capture the enemy's works at Khurbet el Bir, and then swing

round and seize Anzac Ridge. At the same time the 53rd was to attack to the south-west of Gaza on the sand-dune sector between Samson's Hill and Sheikh Ajlin on the west. It was therefore a plain frontal attack against the full strength of the great Gaza position, and the adoption of such a scheme is conclusive evidence of the remarkable confidence of Murray and Dobell.

The plan was to be worked out in two stages. In the first stage the infantry was to advance across the Ghuzze to a line running from the northern slopes of the Sheikh Abbas Ridge along the Mansura Ridge to the El Sire Ridge south of El Sheluf, and this line was to be extended across the sand-hills towards the sea north of Tel el Ajjul. As soon as the position was occupied, it was to be wired and made as strong as possible, the heavy artillery was to be moved forward, and the main attack against the Gaza defences was then to be launched.

The preliminary bombardment began at 5.30 on the morning of April 17th. Shooting from the west of the Ghuzze, Murray's heavy guns made good practice on the Turkish positions, which were now well known. Simultaneously the French cruiser *Requin* and two British monitors joined in the attack from the sea. But the bombardment, although heavier than anything known up to this time in Palestine was quite inadequate against such earthworks as existed at Gaza. Murray lacked the guns—and especially he lacked the munitions—for a long-sustained barrage calculated even to keep the enemy down in his trenches during the advance of the British infantry. Moreover, the sand-dunes between Gaza and the sea, and the cactus hedges and sandy soil from the edge of the sand-dunes round to Ali Muntar, served to smother the shell-bursts and make them relatively harmless. Furthermore, Murray, although he had now a number of heavy batteries, had not guns enough to engage in effective counter-battery work and at the same time to bombard the Turkish trenches.

It has been explained in the preface that this volume deals with the British troops on the front only so far as it is necessary to make clear the work of the Australians. In none of its chapters does it attempt to set out in detail the work of the British forces. From this time forward, as those

forces are increased, the relative neglect of troops other than Australian will become still more marked, and readers should keep in view the fact that this is due solely to the Australian character of this work.

Chetwode's Desert Column command was now limited to the mounted troops; the whole operation was under the direct control of Dobell, whose headquarters were at Belah. It has already been said that the scheme commended itself to neither Chetwode nor Chauvel, the two most experienced leaders on the front; and it is interesting to record that one British commander, after outlining the details of the attack to his brigadiers, concluded with the remark: "That, gentlemen, is the plan, and I might say frankly that I do not think much of it." But Dobell, who now commanded a substantial army, appears to have had no such misgivings when, shortly after 7 o'clock on the evening of April 16th, the infantry moved from their camps west of the Ghuzze, and advanced towards the wady crossings.

By 7 o'clock on the morning of the 17th the 52nd and 54th Divisions had made good the line Sheikh Abbas-Mansura-Kurd Hill. So far the Turks had not seriously resisted the march, and the only casualties were six men shot by outlying enemy snipers. One tank, however, which was in support of a brigade of the 54th Division on the right, came under heavy artillery fire soon after dawn, and after receiving three direct hits was set on fire and put out of action. As soon as the infantry reached their positions they commenced vigorously to dig themselves in, and the enemy now opened upon them with many guns and during the day inflicted 150 casualties. Most of the line was painfully exposed in full view of the enemy, whose gunners also easily covered the wady and so were enabled to harass the British communications.

The Desert Column troops had been early astir on the right. Two hours after midnight Anzac Mounted Division was in position at Shellal, the Imperial Mounted Division was concentrated at Tel el Jemmi, while the Camel Brigade remained for the time being at Abasan el Kebir. By free reconnaissance during the day the two mounted divisions, assisted by McKenzie's light car patrol, located the enemy's

line on the flank, which, running roughly parallel with the Gaza-Beersheba road, extended from Khurbet Sihan through Atawineh and Um Adrah on to a point two miles east of Hill 420, south-west of Hareira. The advanced patrols did a little skirmishing with the enemy, but were never seriously engaged, and had only about thirty casualties. That night the two mounted divisions left a line of outposts extending from the right of the 54th Division to El Gamli on the Ghuzze, while the main force of horsemen was withdrawn to the west of the wady.

During these preliminary operations enemy aircraft many times bombed the mounted troops. On April 17th a bomb was dropped into a camp of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade limbers and spare horses at Shellal. Six troopers were killed, and Captain C. C. Easterbrook¹ and twelve other ranks wounded. The horses always suffered severely from these raids, and here seventeen were killed and thirteen wounded.

All day the infantry had worked hard at the consolidation of the new line; the heavy guns were advanced, and munitions and water brought forward in preparation for the second and decisive phase of the operation. The enemy was perhaps never in doubt as to the British plan of attack; but this necessary preliminary movement to the Mansura position confirmed his belief that Gaza would be the main British objective, and gave him two full days in which to complete his defences, study his zones of rifle and machine-gun fire, and register the ranges for his artillery. The 53rd Division, which had not yet crossed the wady, during the morning pushed forward strong reconnaissances in the direction of Samson's Ridge and Sheikh Ajlin.

On the 18th the two mounted divisions repeated and extended their reconnaissance of the previous day. The two days' probing had convinced Chetwode that, if his brigades were to make a dismounted attack, they would be unable, unless aided by the infantry, to pierce the line on the flank. He communicated this opinion to Dobell, and asked that, when a general advance was ordered, part of the 74th Division (which was still in reserve) should be directed against the

¹ Maj. C C Easterbrook, D S O , M B E , M C Bde-Major 2nd L H Bde. 1918/19 Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of New Lambton, Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. West Maitland, N.S.W., 25 May, 1889.

Atawineh Redoubt. On the infantry line the 18th passed quietly, except that the enemy continued to shell the advanced trenches and the communications and reserves about the wady. In the evening the Camel Brigade was withdrawn from Desert Column, and placed under the orders of the 54th Division. Dobell had now decided to attack all along the line early on the morning of the 19th, and final orders were issued.

Despite Murray's assurances to the War Office that all ranks had been aroused to a pitch of "great enthusiasm" by the engagement of March 26th, the army which awaited the dawn on the morning of April 19th was one filled with forebodings. Men who have been for some time in the field are quick to perceive the true feelings of their immediate leaders, and infantry and mounted troops alike had at this time little faith in the High Command or in their own capacity to overrun the Turkish position. Nevertheless there was no doubt about the morale of Dobell's army. All brigades were strong in numbers, and the men were in excellent condition; three of the infantry divisions, with the exception of one brigade, had not been in action for a long time; and, if officers and men regarded the adventure ahead of them as one unlikely to be attended by success, they were none the less determined to strain human endeavour to breaking-point. The night was fine but very cold, and the men waited impatiently for daylight. At 5.30 a.m. on the 19th Dobell's artillery opened its bombardment of the enemy's positions. Gas-shells were freely used against Ali Muntar and other strong points, and the *Requin* and the British monitors (Nos. 21 and 31) fired all their guns at Ali Muntar and the surrounding positions. The gunnery from the ships appeared to be effective. "This accurate and sustained fire," Dobell wrote afterwards in his report, "must have rendered the task of observation from Ali Muntar mosque a precarious task to the enemy," but, if it did, it certainly did not interfere with the effective shooting which the Turkish and Austrian batteries maintained throughout the day's fighting. At 7.15 a.m., after nearly two hours' bombardment, the 53rd Division on the extreme left advanced towards Samson's Ridge and Sheikh Ajlin, and a quarter of an hour later, in order on the right, the 52nd Division, the 54th, the Camel Brigade, the 4th and 3rd Light Horse Brigades, and

the 5th Mounted Brigade were all pressing forward. The Anzac Mounted Division, which was to protect the right flank, also advanced briskly.

The Camels and the brigades of the Imperial Mounted Division had a considerable distance to travel after dismounting, and therefore, with the exception of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, did not immediately come under fire. But the 52nd and 54th Divisions suffered heavy punishment immediately they left their trenches. The 52nd Division, striking for Ali Muntar and its surrounding defences, had charge of the most difficult sector of the whole line; and unfortunately Major-General Smith was contained by the El Sire Ridge, along which he was advancing, to a very narrow front, on which it was practically impossible to use more than one brigade. At a little after 8 a.m. this brigade (the 155th) captured Lee's Hill, on the ridge 3,500 yards from Ali Muntar, but on attempting to continue the attack the brigade came under very heavy machine-gun fire from Outpost Hill only 1,000 yards away on its direct front. This reduced the rate of progress, and the 156th Brigade on its right, which could not come into action until the 155th had made further progress, was kept almost idle for some hours.

On the right of the 52nd, the 54th Division was making good headway despite severe casualties, and soon its left flank, the 162nd Brigade, was in front of the 156th. This left the 162nd open to heavy enfilade fire from the direction of Ali Muntar. At 9 a.m. a battalion had reached the Gaza-Beersheba road and cut the telegraph wires, and further to the right part of the 54th was closing on the sector known as "Beer Trenches" and the strongly defended position afterwards known as Tank Redoubt. On their right, again, the Camels were also rapidly approaching Tank Redoubt, and the 4th and 3rd Light Horse Brigades were within a few hundred yards of the enemy's main front line.

But although the attack had everywhere been marked by the greatest dash, and most of the brigades were now close to the enemy's positions, the Turks were nowhere seriously menaced. From Atawineh, where the light horse riflemen were securely held, to the sand-dunes in the west where the 53rd Division was arrested on Samson's Ridge, the Turks with

their machine-guns and artillery never lost control of the situation. With one single exception at Tank Redoubt, every attempt by the infantry and the mounted men to reach the enemy trenches was shattered and frustrated.

The five remaining tanks, which were handled with great skill and gallantry by their individual commanders, moved simultaneously in advance of the infantry and made some progress for a while in the morning. Had they been concentrated on a narrow sector they might have enabled the infantry to make at least one serious breach in the enemy's line. But they were scattered along the front, and, advancing singly on the naked slopes, became in turn targets for a great number of the enemy's guns. So heavy was this fire that, even where the tanks for a time escaped destruction, the infantry following was practically destroyed by the bursting shells. One tank in front of the 52nd Division was boldly driven forward and reached Outpost Hill; but the infantry was unable to follow, and the tank, after demoralising the enemy and causing considerable losses in his trenches, was set on fire by his artillery and burnt out.

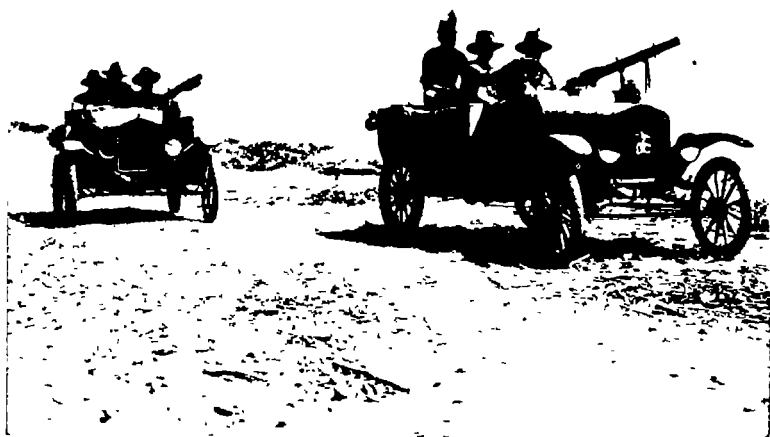
The Turks began to counter-attack as early as 9.30, when two battalions were thrown against the exposed left of the 54th Division. Four British machine-guns were at once rushed forward, and the gunners, after inflicting heavy losses, smashed the advance. Several times during the day enemy aggression was similarly checked, but the readiness of the Turks to seize every opportunity for the offensive was clear evidence of their strength and superior positions.

The problem before the infantry was a very plain one, and divisional commanders and brigadiers, having given their battalions their objectives, could do little or nothing more. There was no opportunity for manœuvre or changing tactics. If the troops, supported by the artillery, were not strong enough to cross the bare country in the face of the concealed enemy, the operation must fail. Dobell was nobly served that day by his British infantry. For nearly twelve hours the brigades of the 52nd and 54th Divisions, on whom fell the brunt of the assault, faced their hopeless task with splendid courage and sustained endeavour. Time after time the leading waves were annihilated by the deadly machine-guns,

and time after time the succeeding waves pressed forward only to be destroyed in their turn. The artillery shooting on the infantry sectors was good, although gunners from the lower ground had observation inferior to that which favoured the enemy, and unfortunately the light clouds, which during most of the day overhung the battleground, made the work of the airmen who were co-operating with the batteries difficult and unsatisfactory. Nothing but a barrage sufficiently heavy and accurate to keep the Turkish machine-guns and rifles temporarily out of action could have enabled the infantry to reach the Turkish lines. Consequently, although platoon and company commanders threw away their lives with utter recklessness, and the Lowlanders of the 52nd Division and English Territorials of the 54th followed them unflinchingly, their heroic endeavour was in vain.

While the infantry was striving so finely but to no purpose, the Camel Brigade and the 4th and 3rd Light Horse Brigades were similarly engaged on the right. The enemy had foreseen that the main British blow would fall on Gaza; but, knowing the quality of Chetwode's mounted troops, and fearing a dash at his rear, had taken no chances as to his flank towards Beersheba. On the morning of the 19th his line of trenches and redoubts in that direction was held in strength by infantry supported by many batteries, while out on his extreme left he had the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division. Before Gaza, where the British infantry advanced, the terrain, although bare of surface-cover, was to some extent relieved by small wadys and a number of ridges; but further east, where the right flank of the 54th Division, the Camels, and the two light horse brigades were assaulting, the long slopes up to the enemy line were, except for slight undulations, almost as even as a floor. Scattered crops of barley, just coming into ear, and splashed with patches of red poppies, provided the sole cover for the advancing troops; and the barley favoured the enemy rather than the British and Australians, inasmuch as it concealed his forward posts and snipers.

Dobell had decided to keep the 74th Division in general reserve to the west of the Ghuzze, and therefore refused Chetwode's request for reinforcements for the mounted troops in the attack upon the Atawineh position. But early in the



CARS OF NO. 1 AUSTRALIAN LIGHT CAR PATROL, BESIDE THE DEAD SEA,
1918.

Aust. War Museum Official Photo No. B54



A DISABLED TANK AT GAZA

Aust. War Museum Official Photo No. B2002

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ENEMY MACHINE-GUNNERS IN ACTION AT THE SECOND BATTLE OF GAZA (THE SECOND MAN
FROM THE RIGHT IS USING A RANGE-FINDER)

*From a German photograph, lent by Tpt E P Yeatman, 9th L H Regt
Ausl War Museum Collection No. A577*

morning of the 19th the 161st Brigade of the 54th Division was placed under the command of the Imperial Camel Brigade, and this added somewhat to the strength of the assault towards the right. The 161st Brigade had on its sector the knoll which afterwards was known as Tank Redoubt. Then came the Camel Brigade between Tank Redoubt and the 4th Light Horse Brigade, which was marching roughly with its centre on the Wady Sihan, with Sihan and the country between that place and Atawineh as its objective. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was directed on Atawineh, with the 5th Mounted Brigade on its right pushing for the Beersheba road between Atawineh and Sausage Ridge. Hodgson, of the Imperial Mounted Division, kept the 6th Mounted Brigade in reserve near Mendur and Munkheileh. Anzac Mounted Division, demonstrating against Sausage Ridge, was to prevent the enemy from enfilading the attack of the 5th Mounted Brigade. Smith's Camel Brigade had in immediate support its battery of mountain guns, while two Royal Horse Artillery batteries of the Imperial Mounted Division were on the slopes of Sheikh Abbas to the right and "B" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company was on the right with the 5th Brigade. In addition, Smith and Hodgson were promised general support from Dobell's main artillery force, much of which had its objectives within effective range. The bombardment of the positions began at 5.30, simultaneously with the gunning of the entrenchments about Gaza, but the shooting on the right was very faulty. Most of the shells passed across the front of the Imperial Mounted Division and pitched on to unoccupied territory; while, when the batteries of the division came into action from Sheikh Abbas, their light metal was harmless against the strong enemy earthworks.

The Camel Brigade crossed the Ghuzze in darkness, dismounted about 4,000 yards from the enemy's line, and moved forward after daylight to the Sheikh Abbas Ridge. The 1st and 3rd Australian Battalions, which were to attack, were then about 3,000 yards from Tank Redoubt, which they were to pass immediately on their left. The 1st Battalion, under Langley, was on the left of the Camel line, but the infantry was deployed for action about 200 yards in advance of his flank. When at 7.30 the order for the attack was given,

the infantry moved off strongly, with that 200 yards' start, and Langley recognised that, if his companies were to conform, they must travel fast. Each man carried a pick and shovel in addition to 300 rounds of ammunition. No. 2 Company, under Captain A. E. G. Campbell,² was on the left, with No. 3, led by Captain F. H. Naylor,³ in support, while No. 4, under Captain H. R. Denson,⁴ was on the right, in touch with the 3rd Battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel N. B. de Lancey Forth.⁵ The 2nd Battalion (British) was in reserve.

The two leading companies of the 1st Battalion attacked on section fronts in three extended lines, with their Lewis guns on the right of the second line. The ground sloped gradually up to the enemy, and offered no cover except an occasional slight undulation and little local wadys, worn by flood waters. For the first mile casualties were slight, although both battalions came under considerable shrapnel fire immediately they moved. Campbell's men on the left moved swiftly, but the spirited English infantry was frequently at the double, and the Camels found it hard to catch up the 200 yards and straighten the line. Tank Redoubt, which was now in a cloud of smoke and dust from the bursting of British shells, loomed up vaguely, slightly to their left, but the well-placed enemy line in front of the Camel sector was still indefinite. When the leading men were about 1,200 yards from the redoubt, a British tank, "The Nutty," took up the lead on a track between the infantry and the Australians, and, going on surely and boldly, quickened the pace of the battalions that followed it. But no sooner did it appear than every enemy gun within range switched, as though automatically, on to it, and in a few minutes it was obscured by dozens of bursting shells. The troops on either side had swung instinctively into the wake of the tank, and so caught much of this fire. Machine-gun and rifle fire also became very

² Lieut.-Col. A. E. G. Campbell, D.S.O., M.C., 14th L.H. Regt. Business manager, of Toowoomba, Q'land, b. Cubbo Station, Wee Waa, N.S.W., 17 Oct., 1885.

³ Capt. F. H. Naylor, 1st (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Plantation manager; of Melbourne, Vic.; b. Windsor, Melb., 17 Sept., 1878. Killed in action, 19 Apr., 1917.

⁴ Maj. H. R. Denson, D.S.O., 14th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Hong Kong, 27 June, 1888.

⁵ Lieut.-Col. N. B. de Lancey Forth, D.S.O., M.C.; Manchester Regt. Commanded 3rd (Anzac) Camel Bn., 1917, 7th Bn., Essex Regt., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army, served in ranks of Q'land Bushmen in South African War, b. Dwaroon, near Warrnambool, Vic., 22 Dec., 1879. Died, 5 March, 1933.

active, and began to cause gaps in the already thin ranks of the attackers.

The British, still in the lead on the left, were the first to receive this heavy punishment, and, as their leading wave dwindled, the Australians pulled up abreast of them. About half-a-mile from the redoubt, Campbell, with No. 2 Company, lost touch with No. 4 Company on his right, which had become separated by a slight but increasing ridge. This exposed his flank, but he pressed on in conformity with the infantry. About 350 yards from the redoubt a slight ridge, running parallel to the advancing line, offered a little cover, and here Campbell halted his leading men. So far, not a shot had been fired by the Camels, but, as the men threw themselves down, they came into action. The following waves, which had closed up on the first line during the march, were quickly on the position, and Campbell sent back for the No. 3 Company, under Naylor, which was in support 500 yards away. He then decided that it would be impossible to follow his orders, pass Tank Redoubt on his left, and leave it to the infantry. Unless the infantry at once carried the position—which in their exhausted state was highly improbable—such an attempt must have exposed the Australians to cross-fire at point-blank range. Campbell therefore decided to make a dash with his slender force at the redoubt as soon as No. 3 Company came up; and, while the Camels were endeavouring to build up a line for this heroic attempt, the infantry on the left were held for a similar purpose.

Meanwhile the tank had been in difficulties in a patch of broken ground; after getting clear, its crew temporarily lost direction, turned sharply to the right, and moved along immediately in front of the Camel line. Discovering his error, the dashing officer in charge returned over his tracks. This movement took place on the top of the little ridge; the vast, cumbersome machine, silhouetted on the skyline, and the Australians, now ready with fixed bayonets within a few yards of it, were swallowed up in a barrage of shell-fire, and many men were hit.

When the advance began, Nos. 2 and 3 Companies had a total strength of about 200 of all ranks, including Lewis gunners, signallers, and stretcher-bearers. By the time the

No. 3 Company had joined Campbell on the ridge, and the line had suffered the shelling brought down by the tank, about 100 of these had been killed or wounded. The redoubt was now seen to be an entrenched knob a couple of acres in extent, protected by light barbed-wire entanglements. It stood a few hundred yards in front of the main line of Turkish trenches extending towards Atawineh, and was linked up with that system by a communication trench. Standing thus, as an outpost of cleverly constructed earthworks, it was designed to enfilade any approach from either side towards the main line. Campbell sent back messengers to say that he was joining the infantry in their assault on the redoubt, and urged that the 2nd Camel Battalion in reserve should be immediately sent up.

By this time the tank had recovered its position and was heading again for the redoubt. Campbell rushed forward six Lewis gunners fifty yards in advance of his line, where they opened fire on rows of Turkish heads which showed up above the parapets "like cabbages on a wall." As the Lewis gunners commenced shooting, the Australians rose and dashed forward with their bayonets. Two enemy batteries of four guns each were now shooting point-blank at the tank at a range of only about 400 yards, but with miraculous luck the great vehicle rolled on, followed by the Camels and the British infantry. It was now apparently almost red-hot, and belched forth great volumes of smoke; but its heroic crew, with shells bursting all round them, and half-lost in a cloud of smoke and dust, drove it on through the wire entanglements, over the outer circle of trenches, until it reached the centre of the redoubt, the highest point over several square miles of country. There, hit several times in quick succession by the enemy gunners, it broke down and burst into flames.

The gallant crew had nobly fulfilled their task. If the tank had drawn a terrific fire on the Australians and British infantry, it had served them as a lead and an inspiration. Of the hundred survivors of the Camel companies who attempted to follow it over that last terrible 350 yards, about seventy fell before the hail of Turkish fire. But the surviving remnant, undaunted, charged shouting with their bayonets at the Turkish trenches. At the same time that the thirty

Australians, sustained by the super-strength which is given to men in close mortal conflict, began to use their steel on the Turks, twenty gallant men of the British infantry also reached the redoubt. At that moment the position was occupied by about 600 Turks, with some German and Austrian officers. But with the Australians and British it was now an affair of wild desperation, and each man fought with the spirit of ten. The Turks, their nerves shattered by the amazing spectacle of the burning tank, and the fire directed upon it by their own guns, panicked and broke. Many were killed and wounded, forty were made prisoners, and the remainder, to the number of about 500, threw down their rifles, scrambled out of the trenches, and ran across the open for their main line about 600 yards away.

Campbell, a thick-set young Queenslander of great physical strength and activity, was shot several times through his uniform and equipment, but continued to show magnificent leadership. His six Lewis guns were still intact, and he ordered them into a position in the open where they could fire upon the fugitive enemy mass. The gunners mowed down the Turks in swathes, and continued to destroy them until they reached the shelter of their trenches. Campbell then assembled the forty prisoners, led them to the British side of the redoubt, and told them to run for safety. The Turks needed no urging. Already the enemy had opened concentrated gun-fire upon the position, and swept it with machine-guns and rifles from his main line. Moving back across the redoubt, Campbell found himself covered by a German officer with a revolver at a few yards' range. He snatched for his own weapon; but, before the German could pull, a shell pitched into the loose, pounded earth between them. When the dust cleared, Campbell was alone.

The splendid fighting remnant of Englishmen and Australians then hung on to the infernal knoll for upwards of two hours. For a while they lined the trenches facing the Turks, and opened a futile fire against utterly hopeless odds. A German officer was seen walking about on the parapet of an intermediate Turkish trench about 300 yards away, beckoning the Turks to follow him in a counter-attack. The Turks, however, would not come out. Several Australians

fired at the German, but all missed him. Pounded with shells and swept by machine-gun and rifle fire, they melted away until nearly every man had been killed or wounded. But at no time had they any sure prospect of holding the position, and by about 2 o'clock the situation had become desperate. Support was not in sight, nor could fresh troops have joined them without suffering heavy losses; and, unless the attack was to succeed all along the line, the redoubt must be evacuated at nightfall at latest. Campbell had placed his six Lewis gunners in the open to the right of the trenches, where they had a clear zone of fire, and for some time they continued to do effective shooting against the Turkish batteries and enemy formations which could be seen assembling for a counter-attack. One body of Turks, about a battalion strong, began to march in column of route towards the redoubt from the right; the gun-fire was still increasing, and the last of the English and Australians in the position were being shot down. Campbell, during the last stages of the approach and while he was in the redoubt, had sent back six runners with messages. So intense was the fire that four were killed and the other two wounded; none of the messages reached the rear. "I then issued orders," said Campbell afterwards, "to the few remaining men to retire to a small wady on our right rear as best they could. I also communicated my order to the Englishmen. At that time I got a message from a Hants officer on the other side of the redoubt to say that he considered the position hopeless, and was going to surrender."

Campbell next went to warn the Lewis gunners of the evacuation. He found them all on their guns; but five were dead, and the sixth, a lad named Barry,⁶ had his right arm shattered. "I told the wounded boy, Barry," said Campbell, "to save his life as best he could. Barry asked, 'What about my gun, sir?' I told him to leave it and save himself. He replied, 'I think I can carry it'; and he carried it out on his left shoulder, with his right arm hanging broken."

Campbell then returned to the redoubt, where (in his own

⁶ Air-Mechanic W. J. Barry, D.C.M. (No. 4059, No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps). School teacher; b. Yass. N.S.W., 23 July, 1893

words) he found Quartermaster-Sergeant H. L. D. Malcolm,⁷ "who should have been away at the rear, but had joined in the charge for the fun of it. He had no business there at all, but I found him helping wounded, giving men their direction out, and using a rifle between times. A little later, he and Lieutenant E. J. Aylwin⁸ were the only two Australians left. I told Malcolm to go first, which he did only after an argument. He was deaf, and did not seem to hear the intensive firing." Campbell and Aylwin had enlisted in Toowoomba together at the beginning of the war. As the Turks drew very close, Aylwin made his dash, followed by Campbell, under very heavy fire. Aylwin was hit as he ran, but Campbell's luck still stood, and he was one of only five men, out of the 102 who made up the company in the morning, who did not become casualties. Five or six Australians and most of the surviving British were taken prisoners, nearly all of them having been previously wounded. Lieutenant W. M. Fender,⁹ who was wounded in the redoubt, also fell into the hands of the Turks. Captain Naylor, a fine soldier, who had fought at Gallipoli, was wounded while leading his men up to the position, but persisted in going on, and was afterwards killed in the trenches. Nine officers reached the redoubt, and, in addition to Naylor and Fender, Lieutenants L. G. C. Young,¹⁰ B. A. Clark,¹¹ E. J. Aylwin, V. Allan,¹² B. N. Wells,¹³ and F. Matthews¹⁴ were wounded.

While No. 2 and No. 3 Companies of the 1st Camel Battalion were advancing on Tank Redoubt, the 3rd Battalion, under de Lancey Forth, was progressing well on the right.

⁷ Lieut. H. L. D. Malcolm, M.M., 14th L.H. Regt. Commercial traveller; of Woollahra, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Darlinghurst, Sydney, 7 July, 1891.

⁸ Lieut. E. J. Aylwin, 14th L.H. Regt. Overseer; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. St. Kilda, Melb, Vic, 13 May, 1878.

⁹ Lieut. W. M. Fender, 1st (Anzac) Bn, Imp. Camel Corps. Clerk; of Melbourne, Vic., and Ashfield, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Geelong, Vic., 16 Sept., 1887. Died of wounds, 19 Apr., 1917.

¹⁰ Lieut. L. G. C. Young, 3rd (Anzac) Bn, Imp. Camel Corps. Music teacher; of Bondi, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Adelong, N.S.W., 22 June, 1891.

¹¹ Lieut. B. A. Clark, D.C.M.; 5th Bn. Engineer and blacksmith, of Prahran, Melb, Vic; b. Collingwood, Melb., Vic, 12 Feb., 1890.

¹² Lieut. V. Allan, 14th L.H. Regt. Police inspector; b. Ballarat, Vic., 1883.

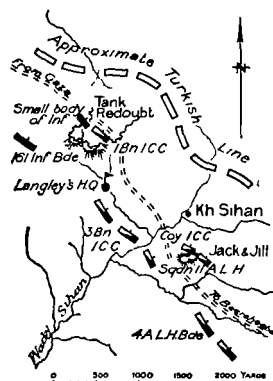
¹³ Lieut. B. N. Wells, 14th L.H. Regt. Overseer; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 24 March, 1893.

¹⁴ Lieut. J. A. J. P. Ryan, M.C. (served as F. Matthews), 9th Bn. Law student, of Charleville, Co. Cork, Ireland; b. Kanturk, Ireland, 8 March, 1885.

With two companions in the firing line, one in support and one in reserve, the men moved forward under heavy fire from the Turkish batteries. Before the tank which reached the redoubt had taken up its position between the 1st Battalion and the English, it had followed the course of the 3rd Battalion, and the artillery fire upon Forth's men was in consequence greatly increased. Conforming to the 1st Battalion, despite the gap caused by the check to No. 4 Company, the 3rd Battalion rushed a trench on some high ground to the right of Tank Redoubt, and captured a number of prisoners. The leading company then continued its advance across the Beersheba road to some commanding ground, where the Camels were joined by a squadron of the 11th Light Horse Regiment, which came up on their right. This marked the extreme point reached by British troops. General Headquarters was afterwards disinclined to credit the claim of the Australians to have penetrated so far, but towards the end of the year the bones of three men of the 3rd Battalion were found on the ridge, grim testimony of the valour of the "Fighting Camels."

With Lewis guns and a machine-gun placed on one of two little mounds (afterwards known as "Jack and Jill") to the north of the Beersheba road, this body of Camels and light horsemen found a good target in the Turks who were massing on their left for the counter-attack against Tank Redoubt. They also shot a number of horses in the gun-teams of an enemy battery, which, startled by the British advance, was limbering up to retire; but all the guns escaped.

The men on Jack and Jill were deep into the enemy line; but the success was purely local, and in the absence of strong and immediate support could not be exploited. Moreover these Australians had suffered severe casualties, and the squadron of the 11th Light Horse soon received orders to withdraw in conformity with the rest of the 4th Brigade line.



Captain A. R. Norris,¹⁵ who led the Camels, had been wounded on the march up, and Lieutenant J. Davidson¹⁶ (who succeeded him) ran across to the officer commanding the squadron of the 11th, and asked him to stand his ground. But the light horseman had definite orders, and Davidson with a single Camel company was therefore left in the air. Forth, who during his distinguished associations with the Camel Brigade was never far behind his foremost men, held the position until the Turks, after heavy shelling, assaulted with infantry in crescent formation. The order was then given for a withdrawal sufficient to straighten the line, and the company fell back a few hundred yards. Forth was wounded at this stage, but remained with his men, and continued to direct the fight.

¹⁵ Maj. A. R. Norris, M.B.E., M.C. Imperial Camel Corps. D.A.A.G., Aust. Mtd. Div., 1919. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Wallanbilla and Roma, Q'land; b. Williwa, N.S.W., 21 Dec., 1884.

¹⁶ Lieut. J. Davidson, M.C. 15th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Cowra, N.S.W.; b. Aberdeenshire, Scotland, 7 Feb., 1882.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECOND GAZA ENGAGEMENT—*continued.*

THE orders to the Imperial Mounted Division left a large amount of discretion to General Hodgson. He was to demonstrate strongly against the Atawineh defences, and so hold the enemy on his front and away from Gaza, where the main attack was being made by the infantry. If the opposition was not excessive, his brigades were to push right through—in which case the horses would be brought up and the troops of Desert Column might have done destructive work against the enemy's rear. Orders which allow such latitude in fulfilment, although often unavoidable, are seldom satisfactory in action. Passed to brigade and from brigade to regiment, they lead, unless communications continue exceptionally good, to different interpretations by different leaders. Some regiments will maintain their advance; others, perhaps on a more difficult sector, will be brought to a halt. At the second Gaza engagement the regiments of the 3rd and 4th Light Horse Brigades met with opposition more formidable than had been anticipated by General Dobell; but all treated the advance as one to be made regardless of cost, and fought on with their utmost strength and ingenuity to reach the Turkish line.

The advance of Hodgson's division was to some extent disorganised by the premature action of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Royston. The regiments had marched from bivouac in the darkness, crossed the Ghuzze, and, half-choked with the dust raised by the horses, moved forward on compass bearings. They had then deployed, mounted, before dawn, a delicate operation in unknown country, but here carried out with complete success. Their advance, like that of the rest of the army, was timed for 7.30 a.m. But Royston, owing to some misunderstanding, and in a fashion characteristic of all his impetuous actions, led his regiments forward before dawn until they were one and a half miles in advance of Munkheileh, where the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, which was to conform on their right, was still awaiting orders to move. As the men went forward on foot, they came under fire from

Sausage Ridge on their right; as usually happens, they swung towards the Turkish batteries. This brought them on to the yeomanry sector, and at the same time made a gap inevitable between their left and the 4th Light Horse Brigade. At 6.40—nearly an hour before the time appointed for the attack—Hodgson ordered Royston to halt until the yeomanry and the 4th Brigade came up on either side of him.

In this engagement the 4th Light Horse Brigade under Meredith, operating between the Camels and Royston's brigade, had only the 11th and 12th Regiments. It was nevertheless given a full brigade sector, and Meredith from the outset had only two squadrons in reserve. Major K. A. McKenzie,¹ a capable Duntroon youngster, was this day winning his spurs as brigade-major. The 11th Regiment under Grant, and the 12th under Lieutenant-Colonel H. McIntosh,² dismounted at Aseiferiyeh, about two and a half miles from the Atawineh Redoubt. Advancing on the right of the Wady Sihan, McIntosh led his men direct on Atawineh, while Grant, whose sector included the wady, pushed for the Turks between Atawineh and the right of the Camels. A barley crop, gay with red poppies, covered the slopes; the dew had been heavy, and the men were soon wet above their knees. Moving in column of troops, with the men of the leading wave about ten yards apart, the light horsemen presented, as they always did on foot, a painfully slender force for an assault on substantial and strongly-garrisoned earth-works; and there was not an officer in the brigade, or in the whole division who believed that the enterprise had the faintest chance of success. As they reached a spot afterwards known as "Two Tree Farm," where the brigade subsequently established its headquarters, they overran an enemy outpost and took fifty-six prisoners. But shrapnel was now bursting freely over them and, after they had passed the two trees, the Turks swept their line with machine-guns and rifles. At this time Royston, galloping across the open, reported a wide gap between the 3rd and 4th Brigades, and McIntosh's reserve

¹ Lieut.-Col. K. A. McKenzie, D.S.O., G.S.O.(2) Desert Mtd Corps, 1918/19. Duntroon graduate, of Highton, Geelong, Vic.; b. Brunswick, Melb., Vic., 6 June, 1893.

² Lieut.-Col. H. McIntosh Commanded 12th L.H. Regt., 1916/17. Grazier, b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 14 June, 1868. Died of wounds, 24 Apr., 1917.

He was carried out, and the bleeding was stopped; but a night or two afterwards, as he was lying in a hospital train at El Arish, the wound re-opened, and he was found dead in the morning. McIntosh had fought at Gallipoli and was a daring leader, much loved by his men. Lieutenant E. H. Cross,⁴ adjutant of the 12th, was wounded soon afterwards; in one of the squadrons every officer was a casualty before 10 o'clock.

On the extreme left one squadron of the 11th Regiment continued to make slight headway, and, as we have seen, joined up with de Lancey Forth's Camel battalion. But the punishment was now destructive along the whole front, and Grant was forced to make a slight withdrawal. So far not a sign of Turks had been seen in the earthworks ahead; but, as the British artillery practice on the sector was exceedingly poor, and only an occasional shell was pitching on to Atawineh, the enemy had undisturbed shooting at 800 yards upon the exposed Australian line. Cameron, who had taken over the 12th Regiment, therefore withdrew his two squadrons on the left to conform with the 11th, but kept the squadron on the right on the ridge which they had gained, in the hope that the 3rd Brigade might be able to join up there. But Royston's regiments were now in similar difficulties further back. All day the 11th and 12th maintained their line. The casualties exceeded 30 per cent. of all ranks, and yet the men continued in the highest spirits. "There was constant laughter among the barley" said one of the officers. "Our fellows took the heavy casualties almost as a joke. 'Stretcher-bearer here,' shouted a trooper, 'I have got one in the leg.' He sat up laughing, and was instantly killed by shrapnel." When at 7.30 in the evening the line was withdrawn, all but one of the wounded and dead were carried out.

At daylight on the 19th, when the 5th Mounted Brigade of the Imperial Mounted Division was about Munkheileh Rijl, and the 4th Light Horse Brigade was to the east of Aseferiyeh, both still awaiting orders, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in the centre—having, as has been already stated, advanced dismounted in the darkness—was far up the slope

⁴ Lieut. E. H. Cross, 12th L.H. Regt. Company secretary and accountant; of Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, N.S.W., 8 July, 1874.

and only about 800 yards from Atawineh. The 9th Regiment was on the right, the 10th on the left, and the 8th, still with its horses, in reserve. The 9th and 10th marched one and a half miles on foot, and it was not until daylight that they discovered their isolation. So far their presence had not been detected by the Turks, but, with the dawn, as they moved through the patches of barley and intervening grassland brilliant with wild flowers, and startled many quail which awakened memories of pleasant sporting days in Australia, they were heavily shelled. Casualties were numerous; progress became very slow, and soon the line was halted until the other brigades should receive their orders to advance. Lying down in the barley, the men maintained constant rifle-fire upon the enemy trenches ahead, and admirable support was given by the Machine-Gun Squadron under Major C. L. Nicholas.⁵ Always exposed in the front line, the gunners streamed their fire on to the Turkish parapets; without their support the light horsemen must have been annihilated early in the day. But they were without definite targets, and the Turks, with highly accurate artillery and machine-guns, had all the best of the exchanges.

In actions such as this brigadiers are generally permitted to use their discretion as to how far they will gallop before dismounting for the attack on foot. Obviously the nature of the country is a deciding factor, as the regiments can gallop close up, despite casualties to the horses, if the ground is favourable for subsequent withdrawal, or if there is cover for the animals close to the firing line. On this day the 5th Mounted Brigade, led by a dashing soldier, Brigadier-General P. D. FitzGerald,⁶ an Australian-born Imperial officer, galloped deep into the zone of shell-fire. The movement cost the brigade several horses, but very few men were hit; the casualties were certainly lighter than they would have been in marching slowly over the same ground dismounted. But after leaving their horses the yeomanry found the enemy fire too deadly for progress, and were unable to get up and conform with the line of the 9th Light Horse Regiment on their

⁵ Maj C. L. Nicholas, 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqn. Farmer and orchardist; of Balingup, W. Aust.; b. Cornwall, Eng., 19 March, 1884. Died, 19 Aug., 1919.

⁶ Brig-Gen. P. D. FitzGerald, D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; of Turlough, Co. Mayo, Ireland, and St. Kilda, Vic., b. Castlemaine, Vic., 18 April, 1872. Died, 17 Aug., 1933.

left. Meanwhile the 9th and 10th Regiments had resumed their advance, and were now within 500 yards of the Atawineh trenches. They rushed a small system of enemy works near the Gaza-Beersheba road, and took about seventy prisoners without much loss, but were unable to reach the forward line of the 12th Regiment on their left, while their right flank was exposed because of the check to the yeomanry. Their right was therefore thrown back to join up with the yeomanry. This movement increased the gap between the 3rd and 4th Brigades; the 8th Light Horse Regiment was then sent in to assist Major Cameron's squadron of the 12th in closing it.

The local success of Royston's regiments on the Beersheba road drew upon them greatly increased artillery fire, especially from Sausage Ridge on their right, from which the 5th Mounted Brigade was also being heavily bombarded. At 10.30 a.m. the yeomanry occupied a ridge close to the Beersheba road, but had their right bent back to engage Sausage Ridge. Soon afterwards the Wellingtons of the New Zealand Brigade advanced along Sausage Ridge in support of the yeomanry, but were at once, like the rest of the line, pinned down by the sure fire of the enemy. The men of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade had from their line a complete view of the operations towards Gaza, and could see that everywhere the assault had been checked. On their own sector they were hanging on desperately with a force rapidly dwindling under the enemy fire. Among the wounded was Scott, who led the 9th Regiment. Every man who showed himself at once became a target for machine-guns and rifles, and there was no prospect that a charge for the Atawineh Redoubt would be sustained in any strength up the bare slope of 500 yards. They could also see large bodies of Turkish reinforcements coming towards Atawineh from the direction of Beersheba.

All day the enemy's artillery was exceedingly accurate, and it was clear that the gunners had carefully studied the ground and registered their ranges. They picked up the position of the British batteries and led horses with remarkable rapidity, and also made precarious the communications over the exposed ground between the rear and the firing line. Early in the afternoon Hodgson's batteries on the Sheikh Abbas Ridge were advanced so as to give closer support to

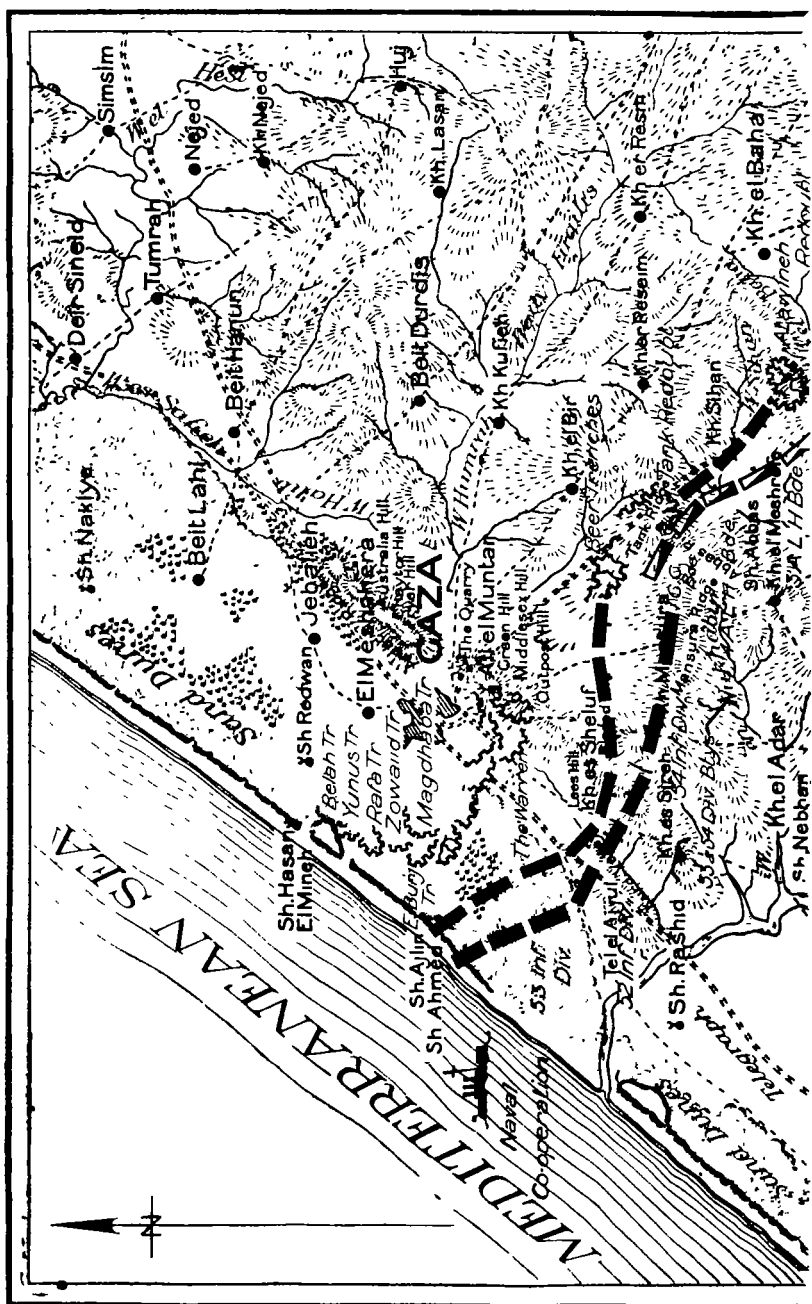
the men in the line; but the light guns, although they to some extent reduced the small-arms fire of the enemy, produced little or no effect upon his trenches.

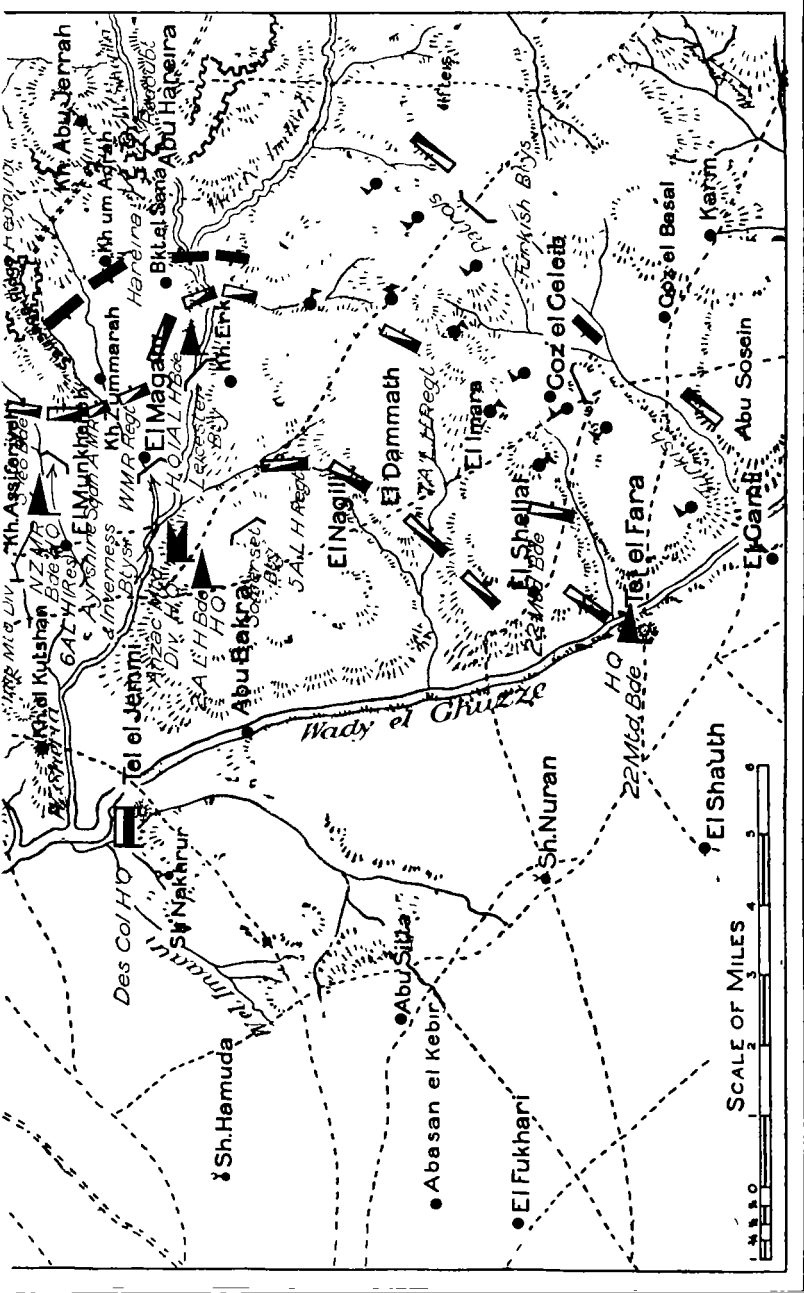
At about noon the 5th Mounted Brigade made some slight headway, and the 9th Light Horse Regiment was ordered to bring forward its right again as a preliminary to a general assault on Atawineh. As the squadrons moved they were deluged by fire, and men fell thickly; to save the regiment from complete destruction, it, together with the rest of the 3rd Brigade, was withdrawn for a few hundred yards. On the way back the barrage was incessant. As, however, the Turks made no attempt to leave their trenches, and as the 4th Brigade was still holding to its ground, Hodgson shortly before 2 o'clock again ordered the 3rd forward. Already the regiments had suffered shattering casualties, but upon receiving the order they advanced with the same freshness as had marked their first attack in the morning. Under terrible fire they pressed on to their original position, but there again were arrested and held. While they were struggling forward, the Turks were developing a formidable counter-attack along the whole line from the coast towards the east. This blow, falling upon the right of the 54th Division and the Camel Brigade, forced these troops to give some ground, thereby exposing all Hodgson's division to enfilade fire from the west; the cross-fire from Sausage Ridge on the east also became heavier than at any time earlier in the day.

The exposed 3rd Brigade, however, stood firm, and the spirits of the men were greatly cheered by the timely arrival of the 6th Mounted Brigade—which, having been in reserve, now came forward at the gallop almost to the firing line. Two regiments of this brigade, perhaps the finest body of yeomanry which fought in Palestine, were sent to reinforce the yeomanry of the 5th Brigade; the third went to the support of the 8th Light Horse in the gap between the 3rd and 4th Australian Brigades. At the same time, as the position was now critical, the 263rd Field Artillery Brigade of the 74th Division was ordered up to support Hodgson's line, and Major Daniel came smartly into action. Thus reinforced, Hodgson's artillery concentrated upon the enemy's line at the points where the Turks were being massed for the



MAP





SECOND BATTLE OF GAZA—POSITION AT 2 P.M., 19TH APRIL, 1917.

counter-attack, and, with the assistance of machine-gun and Hotchkiss,⁷ the storm-troops were dispersed and the offensive never developed. But while the British guns were of necessity devoted to the enemy's trenches, his batteries continued to enjoy immunity from fire, and all the afternoon they bombarded Hodgson's men with frontal fire and enfilade from both sides.

So marked was the superiority of the enemy's guns that, while they kept the light horsemen and yeomanry under constant bombardment, they had guns to spare against the British batteries. At one time during the afternoon they concentrated on "B" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company, commanded by Major the Hon. R. M. P. Preston, which had all day been in close support of the 5th Mounted Brigade, and had fired 1,400 rounds during the action. One gun and two limbers of the battery were quickly knocked out, and the gunners had temporarily to be withdrawn.

The relief given by the 6th Mounted Brigade to the 8th Light Horse Regiment was particularly opportune. The Victorians in the gap between the two brigades had been on the most exposed of all the bare sectors, and were without the protection of even the barley crops. Their losses were heavy. Major A. McAllister,⁸ Captain A. E. Wearne, and Lieutenants A. N. Anderson,⁹ V. St. J. Maunsell,¹⁰ L. A. W. Macpherson, and G. Fay¹¹ were wounded, McAllister and Anderson dying soon afterwards. McAllister, who fell at the head of his squadron, was a veteran of both Anzac and South Africa, and a well-known Australian athlete. Lieutenant-Colonel Maygar, a South African V.C., and always very bold in his personal leadership, rode about the battleground all day

⁷ Hotchkiss Machine-Guns—one to each troop—in place of the Lewis guns were used for the first time by the light horsemen in this fight, and as there had previously been only one Lewis gun to each squadron, the fire strength of the regiments was greatly increased by the change. The light horsemen were very pleased with the Hotchkiss, but the Camels, who continued to use the Lewis, were equally sure that they possessed the better weapon.

⁸ Maj. A. McAllister, 8th L.H. Regt. Drill instructor, Aust. Permanent Forces; of Tenterfield and Lismore, N.S.W.; b. Warwick, Q'land, 5 March, 1869. Died of wounds, 7 May, 1917.

⁹ Lieut. A. N. Anderson, 8th L.H. Regt. Accountant; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Dean, Vic., 13 Dec., 1885. Died of wounds, 25 Apr., 1917.

¹⁰ Lieut. V. St. J. Maunsell, 8th L.H. Regt. Commercial traveller and grazier; of Brighton Beach, Melb., Vic.; b. Charlton, Vic., 23 Jan., 1888.

¹¹ Capt. G. Fay, 8th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Euroa, Vic.; b. Longwood, Vic., 14 June, 1877. Killed in action, 1 Dec., 1917.

on a grey horse, and was at the time in advance of his firing line. It was a day when true leaders recognised that their men needed inspiration, and Maygar gave it in the finest manner. Major H. J. Shannon,¹² a Victorian farmer, equalled Maygar in his cool and daring leadership. Royston as usual rode where the fire was thickest, and he and Maygar on their horses played an active part in the capture of Turkish outposts within a few hundred yards of the enemy's main line. When the line was temporarily withdrawn at noon Trooper Duguid,¹³ who was badly wounded, had to be left on the ground; when the men of the 8th again advanced, they found that he had been killed with the bayonet, and stripped of his clothes and boots, by Turkish snipers who had crept forward when the Australians retired. Nearly six months later, when the 3rd Brigade entered Huj in the great drive up the Philistine plain, they found Duguid's paybook in one of the enemy camps.

All day both British and hostile airmen flew low over the battleground, and the Germans in their superior machines freely bombed the horse-lines, batteries, and various headquarters. A bomb, dropped on the headquarters of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, severely wounded Major C. C. Dangar,¹⁴ the brigade-major. Dangar was a member of a well-known Australian pastoral family in New South Wales, who had for many years held a commission in the 13th Hussars. A capable officer, he served on the general staff with the light horsemen for more than two years, when he was invalided to Australia, and died as the ship reached Melbourne. During the afternoon there developed immediately over the rival lines a fight between a German pilot and a pilot of the British Flying Corps. The airmen manœuvred for the advantage, and the German, getting on top, dived and missed. Then came the Englishman's turn; but, as he swooped on to the enemy, one of the wings of his machine collapsed, and he fell like a stone. For a moment the British line confused the

¹² Col. H. J. Shannon, D.S.O., V.D. 8th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Wangaratta, Vic.; b. Bowman's Forest, Vic., 29 Sept., 1874.

¹³ Pte. W. G. Duguid (No. 363, 8th L.H. Regt.). Farmer; of Minyip and Nhill, Vic.; b. Saltcoats, Ayrshire, Scotland, 23 Aug., 1895. Killed in action, 19 Apr., 1917.

¹⁴ Maj. C. C. Dangar, M.C., G.S.O.(2) Anzac Mtd. Div., 1917/18. Of Uralla, N.S.W.; b. Baroona, Singleton, N.S.W., 12 Jan., 1882. Died of wounds, 4 July, 1918.

aeroplanes, and a great cheer sounded when the men thought that the German had been crashed. Then the red, white, and blue rings were seen on the falling plane, with the pilot standing up holding on to one of the struts. He was instantly killed by the fall.

During this day's bitter fighting there were numberless fine instances of individual gallantry. Hour after hour the fearless stretcher-bearers worked in the open with no hope that the enemy could, under such conditions of fighting, respect their humane mission. Captain W. Evans,¹⁵ of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade Field Ambulance, worked all day under the fire of the guns, and, assisted only by four men, handled no less than 240 wounded. Trooper F. J. Manuell,¹⁶ a Queenslander, was leading forward two horses with Hotchkiss guns, when a shell which pitched immediately in front of him cut one of his feet in two. Manuell kept control of the two terrified, plunging horses, and handed them over before he collapsed. As the line was diminished by casualties, surviving officers picked up the rifles of disabled men, and some of them fired up to 500 rounds. Major P. A. Chambers,¹⁷ of the 12th Light Horse Regiment, was hit in the shoulder, but after having his wound dressed returned to the line, only to be more seriously wounded in the body. Cotter,¹⁸ the international fast bowler, who was afterwards killed at Beersheba, was prominent all day among the stretcher-bearers.

On the vital sector before Gaza the 155th Brigade of the 52nd Division, after very heavy losses, gained Outpost Hill, a feature on the El Sire Ridge, at about 10 a.m. But the knoll was scarcely won before it came under an intense bombardment, and the British, reduced to a handful of men, were driven out. While the brigade was organising a fresh attack against the position, Major Forrest of the King's Own Scottish Borderers on his own initiative assembled some men and gallantly re-occupied the hill from the east. He was immediately joined by troops from the 155th Brigade; but

¹⁵ Lieut-Col W. Evans, M.C., A.A.M.C. Of Waverley, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Cooma, N.S.W., 10 Sept., 1889.

¹⁶ Pte. F. J. Manuell (No. 1096, 11th L.H. Regt.). Stockman; of Pine Hill, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, Q'land, 20 Feb., 1897.

¹⁷ Maj. P. A. Chambers, 12th L.H. Regt. Pastoralist; of Bourke, N.S.W.; b. Wellington, N.S.W., 12 Sept., 1876.

¹⁸ Pte. A. Cotter (No. 924, 12th L.H. Regt.). Clerk; of Glebe Point, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 3 Dec., 1883. Killed in action, 31 Oct., 1917.

every attempt to advance from the hill was shattered as the infantry left the trenches, and in one of these essays Forrest was killed. At 1.30 p.m. the 160th Brigade of the 53rd Division, after many unsuccessful efforts and heavy losses, carried Samson's Ridge. When at 2 o'clock the enemy counter-attacked along the whole front, he was decisively stopped, and suffered the only severe casualties inflicted upon him during the day.

By noon it was clear to Dobell that his prospect of success was slender. Reports from all his divisions were extremely discouraging, and at about 3 o'clock an intercepted wireless message from the Commandant of Gaza to Turkish Headquarters stated that the Gaza garrison was in no need of reinforcement. "Though it was possible it was intended to mislead," said Dobell in his subsequent report upon the day's fighting, "the message added confirmation to the reports sent back by the troops and the aircraft reports, all of which indicated that our attack had not yet succeeded in drawing in the enemy's reserves. In view of this fact, therefore, I considered it to be clear that the opportunity was not yet favourable for an attempt to force a decision by the use of my general reserve. At 5 o'clock the situation was practically unchanged from that of two hours earlier. The enemy still showed no sign of any considerable movement of troops. It was therefore evident that the action could not be brought to a conclusion within the day, and that it would be necessary to consolidate the positions gained and to postpone any further advance until the following day." Adjustments were then made in the advanced line of the infantry brigades, and arrangements vigorously pressed for a resumption of the attack on the following morning. The outlook, however, was anything but promising. The 74th Division was still complete, and Anzac Mounted Division on the right had suffered only slight casualties; but it was plain that, while the infantry might stay on their ground, the line held by the Imperial Mounted Division must be evacuated at nightfall, since it was too weakly occupied to be safe. During the night Dobell, after consultation with his divisional commanders, decided to postpone a resumption of the attack for twenty-four hours.

The retirement of the Imperial Mounted Division was to have commenced at dark, but the difficulty presented by the removal of the wounded delayed it till about 8 o'clock. As the Turks made no demonstration, the withdrawal was carried out in good order. But tired though the troops were, no rest was contemplated for them. The fear of a counter-attack on the flank was strong in Dobell's mind. The day's offensive had been an unqualified failure; worse than that, the enemy from his high ground, and with his regiments intact, might by a vigorous blow have turned the British failure into disaster. As Hodgson's men reached their new outpost line—which had its left on Meshrefe, and ran thence through Aseiferiyeh to Hill 310 on the Wady Sheria—they began at once to ply pick and shovel, and continued digging strenuously through the night. So much nightwork had given the troops the eyes of owls. Though this outpost line was taken up in the dark, it was put down exactly on the positions ordered, and only at two points had the siting of the trenches to be altered at daylight.

This was the fourth night on which the light horsemen of the division had been without sleep, yet digging was carried on at high pressure on the 20th until late in the day. In the morning the Turks could be seen reinforcing and improving their trenches; but, although their patrols advanced within rifle-range, the feared counter-attack was not made. On the night of the 19th Hodgson's orders had been to withdraw his shattered regiments if they were seriously attacked. "The staff that night," said one of the light horse officers, "seemed very jumpy, but our outpost position was a good one, and the men were always quite confident that the Turks could not shift them." After twenty-four hours' hard work by his troopers, Hodgson was satisfied he could hold his ground against any assault the enemy might make.

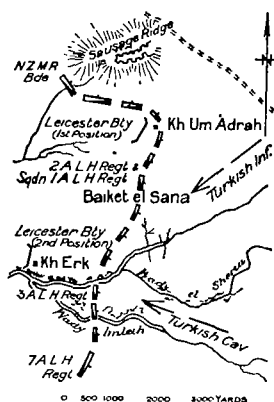
During this day's engagement the Anzac Mounted Division on the right flank was comparatively inactive. About midnight of the 18-19th Chauvel, with definite orders not to make a dismounted attack, moved from Shellal to demonstrate against the Hareira Redoubt, and generally to protect the flank of Dobell's forces. The 22nd Mounted Brigade on the right advanced to cross the Wady about Tel el Fara; the 2nd Light

Horse Brigade marched towards Hareira; the 1st Light Horse Brigade moved on Baiket el Sana, while the New Zealanders remained in general reserve near Hill 380, about four miles south-east of Tel el Jemmi. The 1st Brigade, as advance-guard, reached Khurbet Erk at 5 a.m.; an hour later the 1st Regiment gained Baiket el Sana without opposition, and extended its line southwards to the Wady el Sheria. Granville's men were now about a mile and a half from Hareira Redoubt, and for some hours the enemy resolutely shelled the scattered line, but without causing serious casualties. At 2.30 p.m. Cox relieved the 1st Regiment with the 2nd and 3rd, and extended his line to join up with the 7th Light Horse Regiment, which had pushed three troops under Major Richardson towards Abu Shawish. Unfortunately the 22nd Mounted Brigade (which had advanced from Gamli on the right to link up with the 7th Regiment) appeared to mistake the galloping retirement of the Australian led horses for a general withdrawal, and, evacuating its position, retired across the Ghuzze. This left Richardson with his right flank exposed. Meanwhile the 5th Light Horse Regiment had been digging a line of posts behind the 7th, from Hill 310 (near the junction of the Wady Khurbet Erk and the Wady Imleih) towards Shellal on the Ghuzze.

Cox's line thus ran from Hill 340 along the Wady el Sheria to a point due south of Baiket el Sana, then northward through Baiket el Sana to the right flank of the New Zealanders. Two squadrons of the 2nd Regiment under Bourne occupied the high ground of Baiket el Sana, and the 3rd Regiment under Fulton on their right joined up with the 7th Regiment across the two wadys. Almost simultaneously with the counter-attack of the Turkish infantry from Gaza to Atawineh, the enemy demonstrated strongly against the extreme flank held by Anzac Mounted Division. Infantry (about a regiment strong) massed on the Gaza-Beersheba road about 3,000 yards north-east of Baiket el Sana; at the same time the 3rd Light Horse Regiment came into touch with about 1,000 Turkish cavalry. Some 500 of these were advancing towards Khurbet Erk on the tongue of land between the junction of the Wady Imleih with the Wady Sheria, while the remainder, bearing on the same point, approached on the south side

of the Imleih. Never bold, the Turkish cavalry, although armed with lances, while the Australians were in the open and without a cavalry weapon, refused a mounted conflict, and, leaving their horses, advanced with the rifle. They were supported by one field-piece and a battery of mountain guns, which they carried forward on pack-horses. Fulton disposed his squadrons dismounted across the two wadys; four Maxims of the brigade machine-gun squadron, under Lieutenant C. W. Harris,¹⁹ were boldly placed in the open on the land between the wadys, where they were reinforced by four Hotchkiss guns. The machine-guns withheld their fire until the Turks offered a fine target at ranges between 500 and 900 yards, when they opened, and immediately began to inflict heavy casualties. This opposition, supported by excellent rifle-shooting from the light horse line, quickly stopped the enemy advance; after hanging on for about an hour the Turks retired, mounted their horses and swung across towards the 7th Regiment on the right.

As soon as the intention of the enemy to attack had become manifest, Cox had ordered forward the Leicester Battery. The guns, admirably handled by Captain Elwis, galloped out on to a patch of plain land near Adrah just as the enemy was launching a general assault from Hareira to Sausage Ridge. A single four-gun battery in action among a mass of heavy artillery has a very limited influence; but on a front where the artillery is relatively light its moral effect, even when alone, is remarkable. Opening fire instantly after the teams were halted and removed, Elwis's guns began at once to make effective shooting and caused casualties and considerable confusion in successive waves of Turkish infantry. Nevertheless the enemy maintained his advance until within



¹⁹ Capt. C. W. Harris, and Aust. M.G. Sqn. Bank clerk; b. Wermatong Station, Tumut, N.S.W., 17 July, 1891.

400 yards of the thin line of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment on Baiket el Sana. The light horsemen, despite their inferior numbers, then commenced to do very deadly work with their rifles, supported by two machine-guns and eight Hotchkiss guns posted on the ridge. Support was also given by a squadron of the 1st under Major D. W. A. Smith.²⁰ The Turks halted and tried to build up a firing line, to which they brought a number of machine-guns, and for a time the fight at close range was heavy. The Leicester gunners continued to shoot well until they came under concentrated fire from Turkish batteries, when Elwis galloped his battery out, gun by gun, to a position on the wady just west of Khurbet Erk. There it again opened fire and silenced an enemy battery in the direction of Abu Shawish. After suffering severe casualties, the enemy infantry broke off the engagement and retired. Cox remained on the ground until dark, and then withdrew to Tel el Jemmi to water; the brigade, marching all night, reached bivouac at El Izraa'in shortly before dawn on the 20th. Its casualties were light, but Major A. F. Chambers²¹ of the 2nd Regiment was mortally wounded.

Soon after the attack by Turkish cavalry on the 3rd Regiment, the 7th and 5th Regiments had a lively little encounter with the enemy further west. When the Turkish regiment pulled away from its demonstration against the 3rd Regiment, it swung to the left and was joined by a further substantial mounted force, the combined bodies being about a division strong. This cavalry pressed in rapidly towards troops of the 7th Regiment, which were scattered over a long line; and Richardson, following his orders, began to withdraw towards the line of posts prepared by the 5th. The Australians retired very slowly, and with four machine-guns held the host of enemy horse at bay for over an hour. The rattle of machine-guns always had a disturbing effect upon the nerves of Turkish cavalry, and this division allowed three light horse troops to keep it at a standstill just out of range. During the whole campaign the enemy maintained at least a division of cavalry on the Palestine front, but the

²⁰ Lieut.-Col. D. W. A. Smith, D.S.O., V.D. 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier; of "Gaamboola Cabonne," Molong, N.S.W.; b. Molong, 15 Apr., 1885.

²¹ Maj A. F. Chambers, 2nd L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Warwick, Q'land; b. Nhill, Vic., 29 Sept., 1886. Died of wounds, 20 Apr., 1917.

horsemen never made a resolute attempt to use their lances upon British troops. Indifferently led, and mounted on a nondescript lot of ponies which were usually in wretched condition, they served some useful purpose in reconnaissance and patrol—but even at that work they were too timid to be effective. They practised tactics peculiarly their own. In this demonstration they advanced behind a screen of Arab rabble mounted on camels, donkeys, and mares with foals at foot. These were apparently intended for a stalking horse, since the cavalry could be seen in regular formation in their rear. Two armoured cars had come up in support of the 5th Regiment, and the light horsemen suggested to the British officers that they might make a dash at the Turkish horsemen. But earlier in the day two similar cars, venturing towards Atawineh, had been hit hard by the enemy's artillery, and the officers decided to wait in the hope that the cavalry would attack. This decision becoming known, a disgusted light horseman temporarily strained Imperial relations by saying to the officer in charge: "If you chaps are not going into action, do you mind me tying my old horse to your car for a while?" The posts of the 5th Regiment were evacuated after nightfall.

All along the line the night of the 19th passed quietly, except for intermittent shelling. As Dobell, at his headquarters at Belah, obtained full particulars of the day's fighting, he realised the extent of his failure, his very heavy losses, the consequent weakness of his divisions, and the impossibility of continuing the assault. "During the night," he says in his report, "after further consultation with my divisional commanders, and after fully considering the situation, which was now quite clear, I decided to postpone the offensive without giving a day for the resumption."

The morning of the 20th found the British army with its ambitious attack abandoned. Worse still, there was now danger of a strong counter-attack by the enemy, and the day after the battle was spent in building up the line occupied by the infantry during the operation. But the Turks were content to remain on their ground. All the honours were on their side. Twice assailed at Gaza, they had on March 26th luckily escaped disaster, and, three weeks later, had decisively

beaten off the British assault. Among the Turkish leaders there was no further talk of a withdrawal to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, while the rank and file naturally looked upon the Gaza-Beersheba position as one on which the god of battles favoured their efforts, and on which they could continue to resist all the forces that the British could bring against them.

Dobell in his report to Murray placed his casualties at 5,900, made up as follows:—

54th Division	2,971
52nd Division	1,365
53rd Division	584
Camel Brigade	345
Anzac Mounted Division ..	105
Imperial Mounted Division ..	547

Such losses in a deliberate offensive which proved a failure of the most absolute kind naturally excited the attention of the Government in London. The circumstances were against Murray and Dobell. The disaster came at a most unfortunate time for England. While the two Gaza fights were in progress, enemy submarines were sinking more Allied ships than at any other time during the war, and the outlook, despite the German retreat from the Somme and the intervention of America, had never appeared so gloomy. Murray's disaster, moreover, had been entirely of his own provoking. The Turks had made no attempt to advance against the British advanced base at El Arish, nor could they have done so with any reasonable chance of success. Murray had always been eager for a great advance into Palestine, and had repeatedly urged upon the War Office the advantages of developing the campaign on strong offensive lines. It had been recognised in London that victory at Gaza would mean an immediate menace to Jerusalem, with all the political and religious significance which attached to the probability of the early capture of the Holy City. Cabinet Ministers had turned with special interest to their war maps, had measured the distance from Gaza to the Mount of Olives, and congratulated themselves upon having such aggressive leaders as Murray and Dobell.

When the news of the repulse reached London, disappointment was keen; and Ministers naturally recalled both Murray's insistent demand to be allowed to adopt a vigorous

offensive towards the north, and the confidence he had entertained before the battle. But the Government, if bitterly disappointed, met the situation with one of the boldest and most decisive strokes of the war. "Gaza," it was commonly said at Whitehall, during the weeks which succeeded the fight, "appears to be a second Gallipoli." The fact that the strength of the Turkish position was clearly recognised makes the decision taken by the War Cabinet the more commendable. The Government decided not merely to continue the offensive, but to treat the campaign in an entirely fresh spirit, and to apply to it new leadership, greatly increased forces, and an abundance of the materials of war. Major-General Dallas, who on the 26th March had commanded the 53rd Division, had relinquished his command before the second Gaza engagement. Soon after April 19th Dobell handed over the command of Eastern Force to Sir Philip Chetwode, and in June Sir Archibald Murray was succeeded by General Allenby. Chauvel succeeded Chetwode as the leader of Desert Column, and thus received the well-earned distinction of being the first Australian soldier to reach the rank of lieutenant-general. Chaytor, of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, followed Chauvel in the leadership of Anzac Mounted Division.

Although Murray did not retire from the command until July, it is perhaps proper here to estimate his work on the front, and to discuss the causes which led to his failure as an army commander on a grand scale. Murray was already a very tired man when he was, early in 1916, appointed to the Egyptian command. As chief of staff to Sir John French in the terrible but glorious opening days of the struggle in France, he had greatly distinguished himself; but he had, like most other prominent staff officers at that time, been overworked and overstrained. In France he disclosed a weakness fatal to many men, not only in high military commands, but in all other walks of life; he worried excessively over details which were properly the concern of his subordinates, and dissipated much of his time and strength upon them. This weakness, reappearing in Egypt, made a task already formidable almost impossible of successful achievement. His command in the Near East extended over

all Egypt from the Soudan to Alexandria, and from the Canal to the borders of Tripoli. Until early in 1917 it included control of the British forces at Salonika and, after the intervention of the Arabs, of British participation in the campaign in the Hejaz. In addition, he was responsible for fighting a considerable and always growing army which advanced across Sinai to the edge of Palestine. His task was one far beyond the capacity of the average army commander.

Egypt was at that time in a state of extreme unrest, and "national" and enemy influences were busily fanning the trouble which was to burst into flame soon after the Armistice. The great majority of the Soudanese, thanks to the splendid administrative qualities of its British civil servants during the years which followed Kitchener's decisive campaign, were loyal and tranquil; but in Murray's time a wild section among the tribesmen necessitated the presence of small British forces, which fought a number of sanguinary little engagements. The elusive, thrusting Senussi were only subdued after a prolonged campaign, which, although not marked by great battles, was a heavy and constant drain both on the attention of the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, and upon his very narrow resources in men and supplies. Salonika alone would have been a nightmare to a leader responsible solely for its control. At that time the fighting on the Salonika front was insignificant; but despatches reveal an extraordinary lack of harmony between the French and British interests, and the labour which this threw on Murray was of the most vexatious and wearing nature. Very similar was the position with the Arabs of the Hejaz, where the position was extremely delicate, not only because British activities awakened the jealousies of the various Allied Governments, but also because it involved the troublesome problem of Western intervention in the area containing the Moslem holy places, and of its effect upon fanatical religious susceptibilities.

Such was Murray's vast, complicated, and delicate task. What was his achievement? When the fate of an Empire is at issue, leaders of great armies in the field are tried before a popular tribunal which is rude in its justice and passionate in its decision. Success is extravagantly rewarded with

applause, honours, and wealth; failure is swiftly followed by an ill-considered mob-verdict of disgrace and even execration. In the mind of the multitude Sir Archibald Murray is one of the war's tragic failures; but any impartial consideration of his task and his achievement will decide that, if he failed in his ambitious scheme for the invasion of Palestine, he otherwise justified his appointment to great command and did well for the Empire he served. During the eighteen months in which he held the Egyptian command, Murray subdued the troublesome Senussi and gave peace to the Soudan; handled the difficult Hejaz Arabs with conspicuous skill, and brought them into the war; and, with admirable tact, clever diplomacy, and constant firmness, maintained order in Egypt against innumerable seditious agencies which were working for revolt. He did all that a man unfortunately placed as he was could do with the muddle at Salonika. But all these activities, burdensome as they were, and involving negotiation and campaigns with many foreign and sometimes savage peoples, were subsidiary to his main task of guarding the Canal and Egypt against the Turk and afterwards carrying war into Palestine. In these missions he accomplished much; had fortune been a little kinder, he might have guided the campaign through to the triumphant conclusion attained by his great successor. Murray's work not only made Egypt absolutely safe from invasion, but made easy the conquest of Palestine. He was the pioneer—and he reaped the harvest which is so often the pioneer's bitter reward.

Starting with a totally inadequate force, he cleared Sinai of the enemy and shattered the Turkish offensive against Egypt. Opposed and harassed by the British Government, and always short of men, munitions, and engineering supplies, he laid the railway and the pipe-line across the desert to the sound, watered country of southern Palestine, and pushed his army up to the very gates of the Promised Land. The magnitude of his work in the conquest of the Sinai desert can be gauged from the statement that, by the end of February, 1917, he had laid down 388 miles of railway, 300 miles of water piping, 203 miles of metalled road, 86 miles of wire and brushwood road, while 960,000 tons of stone had

been won from distant quarries. His large ambition, his fine sense of the strategy of the war as a whole, and his strong persistence, ultimately won the War Cabinet to his view that Palestine should be invaded. Then came his tragic failure at Gaza. The order to withdraw the cordon from Gaza at nightfall on March 26th was unfortunate; but seldom has such an error been attended by results so significant and far-reaching. In warfare there is occasionally a feather-edge between brilliant success and disastrous failure. Had Gaza been taken, and had the Turks withdrawn, as was probable, to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, Murray would probably have received from a grateful Government that generous support which was afterwards given to Allenby; and had Philip Chetwode and not Dobell commanded Eastern Force on that day, the attempt against the town would probably have succeeded.

Sir Archibald failed mainly because Dobell, who was leading his Palestine army, was equipped neither by experience nor by temperament for an important command against a European force. There is something fine about Dobell's boundless confidence in his capacity to crush his foe at all hours and on any ground. But battles against Europeans are not won by the mere exercise of boundless confidence. Dobell was not the only British leader who, having achieved success against native troops in petty wars, had made such mistakes as he made in Palestine.

The two engagements before Gaza had a profound effect upon the character of the campaign. Hitherto the fighting had been of the old-fashioned, open kind. The British after Romani had steadily advanced in pursuit of an elusive foe, who was apparently undecided as to his plans, and who perhaps believed that Murray's offensive would cease when he had made Egypt safe by the clearing of Sinai. The scattered disposition of the Turkish force before March 26th seemed to indicate that, although its leaders had prepared strong positions on the Gaza-Beersheba line, they were still in doubt as to whether they would occupy it in strength and make a definite stand there. By March the Turks had carried their railway down the Philistine plain, and even extended it into Sinai a few miles south of Kossaima, on the fringes of

Sinai; their communications were thereby greatly improved. But that railway was only a single narrow-gauge line. The rolling-stock was scanty, old, and faulty. The enemy was without coal for his engines, and was already ruthlessly destroying the rare remaining plantations of olive-trees which stood around Gaza and at other places here and there in the Holy Land. His fear of offending the Arabs prevented him from living upon the resources of the country, and in any case the local supplies of Palestine were then extremely limited. The enemy, therefore, could have had no great liking for the prospect of supporting a large army over a prolonged period between Gaza and Beersheba. Probably, too, he had an exaggerated sense of the strength of the army which Murray was bringing out of the desert against him.

But the two Gaza battles were as stimulating to the Turks as they were mortifying to the British. Both Turkish and German leaders recognised that, if they could check and even shatter the attack of Murray's divisions between Gaza and Beersheba when their defences were in a very primitive stage of preparation, they might reasonably expect to hold that position indefinitely after the earthworks had been completed. There was no more talk of withdrawal; on the contrary, their happy, elated battalions laid aside their rifles and, taking pick and shovel, worked strenuously to make the position impregnable. Simultaneously on the British side Murray's dispirited men, urged on by commanders fearful of a Turkish counter-attack, laboured to make their line secure. Each army held good defensive ground. Each was confident of its capacity to fling back an assault. By the end of April the campaign had reached a stalemate. The conflict had become a stagnating affair of rival trenches, as it had been upon Gallipoli and was now in France. Until one side or the other brought forward a powerful addition to its strength, the position was not likely to change.

CHAPTER XX

CHETWODE'S PLAN

THE second Gaza struggle served to define sharply the Turkish line, which now extended from the sea west of Gaza across thirty miles of country to Beersheba. Over the sand-dunes and in front of the town the enemy trenches were continuous and deep, and were covered by a heavy system of barbed-wire entanglements. From Gaza towards Beersheba the Turks depended upon a chain of formidable earthworks situated in dominating positions. The first of these was the Tank group; then the Atawineh group, the Baha or Sausage Ridge works, and the Abu Hareira-Arab et Teiaha trench system; while the works around Beersheba secured the extreme flank. Between Gaza and Hareira these groups were from 1,000 to 2,000 yards apart, but from Hareira to Beersheba there was a break of about four and a half miles. Some of the gaps were too wide to permit of neighbouring groups covering one another with rifle and machine-gun fire; but a clever distribution of artillery enabled the same guns to arrest an advance against any two or three of them, with the exception of Beersheba.

Throughout the campaign the enemy was very sparing in his use of barbed-wire, probably owing to shortage of supplies or the already heavy strain upon his transport. Nevertheless, in leaving the south-eastern flank of his line without continuous entrenchments and wire, he was justified by the existence of two strong and favourable natural features. His redoubts, or groups of redoubts, from Tank to Hareira, occupied positions of exceptional strength. They stood high on the ridge, and the fighting on April 19th had proved them safe against a frontal attack. Moreover, as the line extended towards Beersheba, they were protected by the traditional friend of the defenders of Palestine—the absence of water on the attacking side. The British could only assail the Turkish flank after they had first developed sufficient water there to maintain troops engaged in the attack.

Summing up, the enemy was practically unassailable in the sand-dunes west of Gaza, and in the cactus in front of the town. The high ground around Ali Muntar commanded every

foot of country for another mile to the east. The Tank, Atawineh, and Hareira groups of earthwork overlooked a naked, low-lying triangle contained between Tel el Jemmi and Gamli on the Ghuzze and Ifteis on the Wady Imleih, and across this triangle the British must advance in any attempt to break the enemy centre; it was also open to cross-fire from Sausage Ridge on the south-east. From Hareira to Beer-sheba his line was not so strong, and his flank was open. But there, as he believed, he was made quite safe by the difficulties of water-supply on the British side.

Sir Philip Chetwode had succeeded to the command of Eastern Force soon after the second battle of Gaza, and on him fell the task of selecting and perfecting the British line. So decisive had been the change of fortune that, as we have seen, the main concern of the British High Command was now to make itself secure against enemy aggression on a bold scale. Digging and wiring commenced on the night following April 19th, and was continued without a pause for some weeks. Battalions and regiments were sorely reduced both in numbers and in spirits, but the change in the command of the advanced army had a cheering effect upon all the men. The rank and file were not perhaps aware of the cause of the double failure, nor clear as to who was to blame; but soldiers who are well-fed and treated with consideration, as were the men on this front, are always eager to seize upon anything which gives them a light heart and a bright outlook. Already they had, in the instinctive fashion of large bodies of men, formed a strong liking for Chetwode. The sourness which prevailed in the camps immediately after April 19th vanished with the changes in the High Command.

The British line ran continuously from the sea eastwards to Sheikh Abbas at a distance of from 400 yards to 3,800 yards from the Turks. Over that sector the defences were strong in entrenchment and deeply protected by wire entanglements. Everywhere the observation was good, and Chetwode desired nothing more than that the Turks should advance against him on that sector. From Sheikh Abbas the line bent back in a series of strong posts to the Wady Ghuzze at Tel el Jemmi, and followed the water-course south-east to Gamli. Lack of water at that date prevented the extension of the line in

conformity with the Turkish defences towards Beersheba; at Gamli, therefore, Chetwode's front turned almost at right angles southwards as far as El Ghabi. Its total length was about twenty-four miles, but only from the coast to Sheikh Abbas was there continuous touch with the enemy. That sector was held by the infantry alone; on the right flank the infantry occupied the posts, while the mounted brigades engaged in reconnaissance and patrol over a wide No-Man's Land between the infantry and the enemy. Broadly speaking, the Turks held the country on the flank as far south as the Wady Imleih, and the British the country as far north as the Ghuzze.

Chetwode's immediate concern was defence, but he was a leader incapable of prolonged inactivity. Moreover the British Government now, for the first time in the campaign, made it clear that it was whole-hearted in the prosecution of the invasion of Palestine. Chetwode therefore attacked with impressive energy a double task. He must restore the depressed morale of his reduced divisions and improve by hard training their marching capacity and fighting efficiency; and he must evolve a scheme for breaking through the stout opposition in front of him. The prospect might have dismayed the spirit of a less resolute and tactful commander. His troops, and especially his infantry, were neither in the humour nor in the physical condition to respond to a call for enormously increased and sustained labour, in the excessive heat of the rapidly developing summer, and on a shadeless area notorious for high winds and dust-storms, which prevailed for days and nights at a stretch. In May Sir Philip wrote, "At present we have battalions of not more than a dozen officers and 300 to 400 hundred men; we have mounted regiments at a strength of not more than two-thirds of establishment; every division is still deficient of howitzers; one division has no organised artillery." Nevertheless he did not hesitate to impose from week to week fresh burdens upon all ranks in his command.

Himself a mighty worker, he set an example which was followed not only by his small Eastern Force staff, but by every officer and by the humblest privates and troopers in his battalions and regiments. He rode or walked his long line from the sea to El Ghabi; like Birdwood at Anzac, his

dominating but kindly personality was familiar to every officer and man on the front. Doubling back, he encouraged and stimulated the great force of British engineers and Egyptian labourers, who were working night and day to carry the railroad and water-supply from the coast to the thirsty inland district towards the flank. For the first time since the British army had crossed the Canal, the soldiers felt the influence of a strong and guiding personality; if they were driven harder than ever before, they knew that they were being driven by a man who did not spare himself, and who was concerned not only with the winning of battles, but with the welfare and advantage of his men. Chetwode was a hard taskmaster, but he was recognised as the affectionate guardian of his army.

Prolonged seasons of work, in the trenches or in the saddle, were followed by brief rests in pleasant camps on the coast; afterwards came a spell of vigorous training before the men returned to make contact with the enemy. Schools for officers and non-commissioned officers were increased and improved. The cavalry schools for officers, while they advanced the already high efficiency of the Australians and New Zealanders, had another much desired result. They brought into close personal touch the leaders of the light horse and the yeomanry, and went far to dissipate the bad feeling which had prevailed since the unfortunate affair at Romani. The yeomanry were now, under their regular cavalry officers, making rapid headway in their campaigning quality; and the light horseman, natural fighter as he was, and hitherto a little arrogant in his bearing towards these slower-witted and less adaptable but great-hearted young British farmers, was quick to appreciate the change. In the campaign across Sinai and on to Gaza the Australian had affected a laughing superiority over the yeoman. From now on he respected him as a worthy comrade and a formidable but friendly rival in arms; and the spirit of cordial competition which existed between them was good in its effect upon both.

From April almost to the end of October the part played by the mounted troops, if almost bloodless, was still extremely arduous. In June the arrival of the 8th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade gave the British command ten brigades of horse, and

it was decided to form a complete yeomanry division made up of the 6th, 8th, and 22nd Yeomanry Brigades. This brought the mounted strength on the front to three complete divisions of three brigades each. Anzac Mounted Division was made up of the 1st and 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade; Australian Mounted Division (the name having been changed from "Imperial" at the request of the Australian Government) of the 3rd and 4th Australian Light Horse Brigades and the 5th Yeomanry Brigade; the third was the new Yeomanry Division. The Notts Battery and the "A" and "B" Batteries of the Honourable Artillery Company remained with Australian Mounted Division, while the Berks, Hants, and Leicesters were given to the Yeomanry Division, and the Essex to the 7th Yeomanry Brigade, which became corps troops. There could be no higher tribute to the work of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Brigade in the early stages of the campaign, and to the quality of Chauvel's leadership, than is furnished by this decision to increase the mounted troops.

The mounted work was divided so as to give each division in turn a month's work over the wide No-Man's Land on the flank, a month's rest on the beach at Belah, and a month's hard training at Abasan. As there was little or no hard fighting—and, after May, no serious anxiety about a Turkish attack—this programme would in a country of normal living have imposed but little hardship upon the mounted brigades. But most of the Australians agree that, with the exception of the 1918 summer in Jordan Valley, this was the most distressing period of the long advance. Water was scarce, the heat oppressive, and the dust perpetual and suffocating. Thirty thousand troops, most of them mounted, moved constantly over a limited area of light clay soil for many rainless months. The dread khamsin added to their trials. The men rode and lived and slept in a fog of dust, which seldom lifted. Even on still clear nights the dust raised by a moving brigade was at times so thick that officers could see neither the stars nor their compasses. The monotonous diet and the absence of vegetables brought about a severe epidemic of septic sores. Few men, from the commanders down, escaped this evil, and

at times the majority of the men in a regiment would be swathed in bandages. Sore hands and faces might seem in war-time a trifling disability, but they had a lowering and irritating effect upon the men.

There was concern also as to the condition of the horses. As Chetwode devoted more and more consideration to the heavy task ahead, and evolved his famous plan which was to shatter the Turkish opposition and win the whole of Palestine, it became clear that the mounted divisions must, if possible, be in prime condition when the time came for the renewal of the offensive. The men could be depended upon; but, unless their horses were strong and fit, the striking power of the army would speedily vanish. The advanced division had its headquarters about Gamli, from which base the three brigades engaged in thirty-six-hour patrols against the enemy. Regiments would leave their camp at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, march through the night, arrive at an advanced position at about 3.30 on the following morning, remain there engaged in various activities until the late afternoon, and return to camp in the early hours of the next day. But the Gamli camp was three miles from water; when horses were watered twice daily, this imposed upon them twelve miles of travelling, and the men were kept always on the move. After the month in the forward area, the animals returned to Belah jaded and low in condition.

In May Chetwode wrote his admirable *Notes on the Palestine Campaign*, in which, after a masterful appreciation of the rival possibilities between Gaza and Beersheba, he laid down in detail the plan which Allenby employed more than five months later for the overthrow of the enemy and the capture of Jerusalem. Chetwode by this despatch establishes his right to rank as one of the soundest and most imaginative Allied leaders engaged in the whole war. It is a classic of constructive thinking and clear expression. It provided Allenby not only with a scheme drawn up by a great strategist and tactician, but—supported as it was by the rehabilitation of a dispirited army, and the brilliant handling and provision of engineering necessities—one relatively easy of execution. When Allenby proceeded from Cairo to Palestine early in July, he possessed both a plan stamped by genius on which to

work, and a force stronger, and man for man incomparably more efficient, than it had ever been Murray's fortune to command.

Chetwode in his notes surveyed first the broad strategic features of the campaign. He pointed out that, while the Turks, "helped by the Russian inertia in the Caucasus and the summer check to active operations in Mesopotamia," had definitely resolved to stand between Gaza and Beersheba, they were not likely to take the offensive. The most they could hope from an attack in force would be to push the British back as far as the eastern edge of the Sinai desert, and even in that they might not prove successful.

Considering next the strength of the enemy as a defensive force, Chetwode, after paying tribute to the capacity of the Turks "to exist on vastly less than would be necessary for a European army," believed they could maintain between sixty and seventy battalions on the Palestine front. That would make them equal in numbers to the British force, although with a something weaker support in artillery. The prospect, therefore, of overthrowing the enemy by a plain frontal attack was not one which appealed to the British leader. Furthermore, even if the Turk could be jolted from his present line by a direct assault, he would still be far from broken. "Every mile he goes back," wrote Sir Philip, "helps his supply and decreases his water difficulties," while north of Ramleh his water troubles would be over. Moreover, "even if the enemy could be forced north of Ramleh, he would probably fight better on the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, which is believed to be one of great strength, and on which he has put in a considerable amount of work. The loss of that line would mean to him the world-wide moral effect of the capture of Jerusalem, and would probably force him immediately to abandon the Hejaz enterprise, as it is the first line from which we can threaten his communications in that theatre."

But Chetwode saw clearly that it was doubtful whether by a frontal attack the enemy could be compelled to retire even to the Jaffa line. The British army was still tied down firmly to railhead. "We can on present scale," wrote the British leader, "by practically immobilising the remainder of the force, place one division and two mounted divisions, or two

divisions and one mounted division, at a distance of twenty to twenty-five miles beyond railhead. This will not put us in a position to put our cavalry on parallel lines after a tactical success, and keep a retreating army really on the move. We shall constantly be obliged to come to a full stop, giving him time to re-organise." Up to that time, the normal rate of progress of the British railway across Sinai and southern Palestine had scarcely exceeded an average of one kilometre a day. Supplies from the coast were at best uncertain, owing to the submarine danger and the great difficulty of landing stores upon open beaches. Therefore, assuming that the Turk could by some means or other be driven off his present line, Chetwode, with characteristic energy, addressed himself to the speeding up of the railway and other transport services. "Careful preliminary arrangements," he said, "suitable and elastic organisation of transport, the collection of railway material at railhead, the training of plate-laying gangs provided by the troops, the utilisation of the earthwork of the enemy's railways for our own railway, luck as regards the weather, and the fullest use of sea-transport, should enable us to give the enemy less breathing-time than at present appears possible on paper. We must not, however, entertain any hope, whatever preparations we may make, of being able to pursue at a speed approaching that which the river enabled the army in Mesopotamia to attain. It would be fatal, in my opinion, to make half-a-bite at the cherry, and to attempt an offensive with forces which might permit us to attack and occupy the enemy's present line, but which would be insufficient to inflict on him a really severe blow and to follow up that blow with fresh troops pressing closely on his heels. Nothing less than seven divisions at full strength and our three cavalry divisions will be sufficient for this purpose, and they will be none too many. Divisions of such poor rifle strength as the 52nd, 53rd, and 54th, and with no drafts to keep them up, will disappear in three weeks' fighting."

Chetwode expressed himself strongly against any attack upon the enemy's "strong modern fortress" at Gaza. He was equally opposed to an attack in the centre across the naked Gamli-Jemmi-Ifteis triangle. Not only was the enemy strongly placed on these right and centre sectors, but a British

success there might prove only local; for the enemy had prepared a reserve line from Hareira to Deir Sineid, and would therefore still stand across the British advance up the Philistine plain and towards Jerusalem. To attack him in the centre on the Tank-Atawineh-Baha sector across the low country of the triangle would be, in Chetwode's opinion, "to attack him in circumstances of every disadvantage. We should have to contend with lack of artillery observation, all the worst of the ground, and great difficulties in respect to water and supply," and there would be no flank on which the mounted troops could operate effectively.

The enemy right and centre, therefore, offered no chance for an assault which could have far-reaching results, and Chetwode turned his attention to the Beersheba flank. From the Gamli-Jemmi-Ifteis triangle the country rises towards Beersheba in a series of bold undulations; this area, although broken by many wadys, is suitable for the movement of all arms. But there the obstacle was lack of water on the British side. The only useful supplies were at Esani, Beersheba, Sheria, and Hareira, and all these places, except Esani, were securely occupied by the enemy. Still, water or no water, the enemy's left flank was his only vulnerable point; and Chetwode's thoughts turned to his engineers. The engineers had made possible the crossing of the Sinai desert; they must make possible the break into Palestine.

Therefore he unfolded his plan of attack. "By suitable arrangements," he wrote, "and the rapid carrying forward of the railway from Gamli or Shellal towards Ifteis when the moment comes, we can place a force in position on the high ground between Irgeig and Taweil el Habari, which should at once cause the evacuation of Beersheba, or, if not, would place us in a most favourable position to attack that place while holding off any enemy coming to its assistance from the direction of Hareira. Once established on the high ground between Beersheba and Hareira, and with Beersheba in our possession, we can attack north and north-westwards, always from higher ground, always with observation, with water at Beersheba, with water at Esani, with water at Shellal, Fara, and Gamli, with rail-borne water east of Shellal, and with the only prospect, which no alternative course affords, of finding a flank on



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE VIADUCT ON THE ASLUJ RAILWAY.

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, vol. 4, p. 105
And. B. in Museum Collection No. B2305



TURKISH CAVALRY IN DISMOUNTED ACTION. (IN THE DISTANCE ON THE LEFT CAN BE SEEN THE
DUST RAISED BY LIGHT HORSE OR BRITISH CAVALRY ADVANCING AGAINST THEM.)

From a German photograph, lent by Tpt. F. P. Yeatman, at I. H. Right.

which we can use our great preponderance in mounted troops; not an ideal flank, for east of Towal Abu Jerwal the country becomes mountainous and rocky, but still a flank which should afford us great opportunities, with water at Tel en Nejile, fourteen miles to the north, and the possibility of cutting the enemy's railway behind him; with water at Sheria and Hareira, a little salt, but good enough for animals, and with a strong pivot on our left flank from Abbas to the sea, on which to swing our right forward towards Nejile, and to force the enemy by manœuvre to abandon Gaza. We must also remember that any fight here must be a fight for water as well as for the enemy's position, and that if we merely take his position we shall be tied down to another tedious advance, with the necessity of providing water mile by mile until we can attack his next position in rear. If, however, we can attack him in such fashion as to compel him to withdraw his full line beyond the Wady Hesi, we shall find water on the line Tel en Nejile-Wady Hesi at once.

"The enemy has put all his best work, all his wire, into this Gaza front as far as Atawineh. His works on the Hareira-Teiaha position are certainly formidable, but there he has not the depth that he has elsewhere, nor the wire; nor have we elsewhere the observation that we should obtain in attacking his left flank.

"The chief factor in success on this flank must be rapidity of action. We must give the enemy every reason to believe until the last moment that we contemplate renewing our efforts against his right. Subsidiary operations against portions of his Gaza front will, I think, be necessary, and it will further be for consideration whether it would not be well at the same time to advance our line in the centre from Abbas to Magam, both in order to encourage the idea that our main attack will come against his right, and in order to establish our centre close enough to the Atawineh group of works to force him to retain considerable forces in that quarter while we make our main effort against his left. In the meantime every preparation would be made to push forward the railway, and if necessary a pipe-line, from Shellal towards Ifteis, so that, after placing our striking force on the high ground between Irgeig and Taweil el Habari, we may be able to undertake the main

operation with the least possible delay and before the enemy is enabled to improve the position on his left flank to any great degree.

"On paper and by the map the chief objections to this line of action appear to be the separation of our forces, and the weakening of our centre, with the consequent danger of a counter-stroke in that quarter. A very short acquaintance with the actual terrain would, however, I think convince any one who had studied it on the ground that a counter-stroke by the enemy between our strong works at Sheikh Abbas and our forces about Bir Saba (Beersheba) launched into the open flat country in the centre would be a most risky operation. Indeed one might hope that the enemy would undertake it, and find himself between the jaws of the pincers."

These notes were written in May. "At the moment," added the writer, "our efforts are concentrated on lessening the extent of front which we hold from Abbas to the sea by concentrating our defence in very strong localities, so that if it should become necessary we may be able to hold that flank with a minimum number of troops. Water and railway preparations are well advanced, based on employing three divisions and mounted troops for the main operations against the enemy's left flank holding our 'fortress' line from Abbas to the sea with not more than two divisions, and retaining the sixth and seventh for pinning operations against the enemy's left flank."

In conclusion, Chetwode struck a peremptory decisive note, such as had unfortunately always been lacking in the despatches of Murray. "There is," he said, "one essential. Divisions must be divisions and mounted divisions mounted divisions. The notes are based on a minimum requirement, in the existing situation, of seven divisions and three mounted divisions (each of three brigades). But they are based on these formations being up to strength, fully armed and equipped, and provided—one of the most important matters of all—with first reinforcements, actually in the country, which should amount to 20 per cent. of infantry if possible, and should not in any case or at any time fall below 10 per cent. Unless we have a sufficient and a regular income, it is impossible to make any reasonable plans involving expenditure."

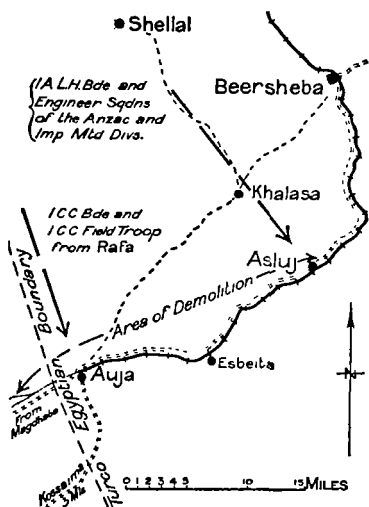
In other words, there was the scheme; but it could be successful only if the War Office supplied the troops, the munitions, and the engineering supplies essential to put it into operation. Chetwode would take no responsibility for ambitious military enterprises with the raw Territorial divisions—uncertain of reinforcements, ill-supplied with artillery, and liable at any moment to be withdrawn to France—which had been the precarious portion of Murray, Lawrence, and Dobell. If the British Government wanted Palestine and Jerusalem, they must in future regard this campaign as one of primary importance, and treat it as they treated the British Army in France.

Late in May the engineers of Desert Column carried out an interesting and highly successful series of demolitions on the Turkish railway south of Asluj. The use of this line was discontinued after the British marched to the Ghuzze, but so long as it remained intact it was a menace to Chetwode's right flank. Moreover, the enemy was known to be very short of steel rails; already he had torn up the old railway from Jaffa to Ramleh for use on the new military lines, and it was anticipated that he might remove for the same purpose the rails on the line from Asluj south to Auja.

The absence of water on the route between Shellal and Asluj, the uncertainty of the water-supply at Asluj and Auja, and the presence of a considerable enemy force at Beer-sheba, made it necessary that the raid on the railway should be a complete surprise to the enemy and rapidly accomplished. Two columns were arranged. One, made up of the engineering field squadrons of the Anzac and Imperial Mounted Divisions, and escorted by the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, was to cover the twenty-six miles between Shellal and Asluj in a single march so as to arrive on the ground at 4 o'clock in the morning of May 23rd; while the other, the Field Troop of the Camel Brigade, was to march simultaneously from Rafa to Auja. This party was to be protected by the Camel Brigade, with a squadron of horse from the Imperial Mounted Division as escort. All the demolition work was to be completed by 10 o'clock in the morning of the 23rd, when the two bodies were to return immediately to their bases. While the work was in progress, the Imperial Mounted Division was to demon-

strate against the enemy south of Beersheba; two brigades of the Anzac Mounted Division were to occupy the country between the demolition parties and the Imperial Mounted Division; at the same time the infantry was to show activity against the Gaza end of the Turkish lines.

The preparations, which were capably directed by Brigadier-General R. E. M. Russell,¹ of the Royal Engineers, were remarkably thorough. The engineering squadrons, which were strengthened by men selected from the mounted troops, rehearsed in detail the work ahead of them, and careful and accurate estimates were made of the time the demolition would occupy. As usual in these adaptable mounted formations, much ingenuity was shown in improvisation. All the explosives, amounting to several tons, were packed in kerosene-tins, and clips for attaching the charges to the rails were made from the steel bands in which hay for the horses was brought up to the front. Between Asluj and Auja were several substantial masonry bridges and viaducts; these were to be destroyed if time permitted, but the first concern of the engineers was to be the breaking of the steel rails, as it was believed that these could not be replaced by the enemy.



Marching from Shellal at 2.30 in the afternoon of May 22nd, Cox's brigade was joined at Fara by these two squadrons of engineers and one section of the Leicester Battery. Soon after midnight the 6th Regiment was thrown round the village of Khalasa to prevent the Arabs from carrying information to the enemy. The locality of operations was reached in the early morning, although the extremely

¹ Brig.-Gen. R. E. M. Russell, C.V.O., C.B.E., D.S.O., R.E. Officer of British Regular Army; of Milford House, Limerick, Ireland, b. Limerick, 2 Sept., 1879.

rough unknown country had somewhat delayed the march, and the first demolition charge was not fired until nearly 8 o'clock. But so perfect had been the training of the men engaged, and so expeditious was their work, that at 9.58 the last charge was fired by the Imperial Division Squadron under Captain Ford-Young,² and twenty minutes later the Anzac Squadron³ under Major Alexander⁴ had completed its share of the task. Meanwhile the Camel Brigade was advancing from Rafa on Auja further to the south. At this time the camels were low in condition owing to excessive work, and the railway was not reached until some hours after the appointed time. With the line destroyed to the north, however, General Smith's engineers were in no danger from molestation, and early in the afternoon the whole undertaking was completed, and the troops were on the march back to Rafa and Shellal.

The enemy, except for light patrols, made no appearance. But although the operation was not hindered by fighting, the raid was an admirable demonstration of careful organisation and brilliant execution. Numbering in all only four officers and less than 100 men, the three demolition parties destroyed every steel rail over thirteen miles of track, as well as a quantity of Decauville line. In addition, they blew up and entirely wrecked one bridge of eighteen arches, one of twelve arches, one of six arches, one of five arches, one of three arches, and one of two arches—also a viaduct over the Wady Theigat el Amirin, and several arched culverts; a number of railway points and switches, station buildings, and telegraph poles, and a good deal of other enemy property were also demolished

² Maj. A. Ford-Young, D S O.; R E. B. South London, 28 Jan., 1883.

³ These were, respectively, the 2nd and 1st Fld Sqns, Aust Engineers.

⁴ Lieut.-Col. J. H. Alexander, D S O., M C.; R E. (ex. S. African Engr. Corps), b. Kimberley, S. Af., 6 June, 1885.

CHAPTER XXI

ALLENBY AND HIS TASK

GENERAL ALLENBY arrived in Cairo on June 27th, and on the following day took over the command from Murray, and proceeded to Chetwode's Eastern Force Headquarters. Had Allenby been able to choose the season most favourable to his fortunes, he could not have selected a happier time for coming. There had been no fighting since the two Gaza engagements which had been so destructive to Murray's army. Certainly the new Commander-in-Chief was faced by a task of great magnitude and difficulty; but the worst was over, and, in view of the definite promises of support which he brought with him from England, it was impossible to believe that when the enemy was next encountered the performance would not be more satisfactory to British arms. Serious as his problem was, he had fine instruments with which to solve it. Thanks to Chetwode, the army, worked and trained at the highest pressure, was daily improving in spirit, and was already a force immeasurably superior to that which had fought in March and April. Chetwode, the second-in-command, was a wise as well as a dashing soldier. Chauvel's work on this front had been, in fight after fight under all sorts of conditions, marked by many brilliant successes and not a single failure. Chaytor, now commanding the Anzac Mounted Division, was one of those rare soldiers who did everything in this prolonged campaign so surely, thoroughly, and yet so quietly and with such apparent ease that it might be said no task set him between the Canal and Amman was big enough to test his full capacity. Hodgson, of the Australian Mounted Division, if not a great master of horse, was a very sound one; and in Major-General G. de S. Barrow,¹ the leader of the new Yeomanry Mounted Division, Allenby had a forceful cavalry soldier of the old, hard-riding school, perhaps the greatest leader of cavalry proper on this front. In his mounted brigades and regiments the new Commander-

¹ Gen Sir G de Symons Barrow, G C B, K C M G, p.s.c. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of South Devon, Eng.; b. Naini Tal, India, 25 Oct., 1864.

in-Chief acquired an exceptional body of shrewd, veteran soldiers and dashing fighters. His Australians and New Zealanders were now all old campaigners who knew the country, the exacting climatic conditions, and the enemy; the yeomanry under their regular cavalry officers, most of whom, like Barrow, had served with Allenby in France during the brief but glorious period between Mons and the Marne, were every day giving more promise of the great work they were afterwards to perform on the Philistine plain.

Then the infantry, if still below the high standard reached by divisions in France, was each day becoming more efficient; and it was a simple matter for Allenby, as a new commander, to make desirable changes in leadership, an advantage over his predecessor which a fresh leader always enjoys. Most important of all, Allenby came to continue the campaign with the British Government solidly and enthusiastically behind him. He had the assurance that his command would not be starved, and that within reason he would obtain all that he needed in reinforcements, artillery, aircraft, munitions, and the vital engineering supplies. In Murray's time the policy of the Government had been chaotic. His offensive from the Canal to Gaza had been at his own risk, and few men under the circumstances would have ventured so far and accomplished so much. But now England was urgent that Palestine should be conquered.

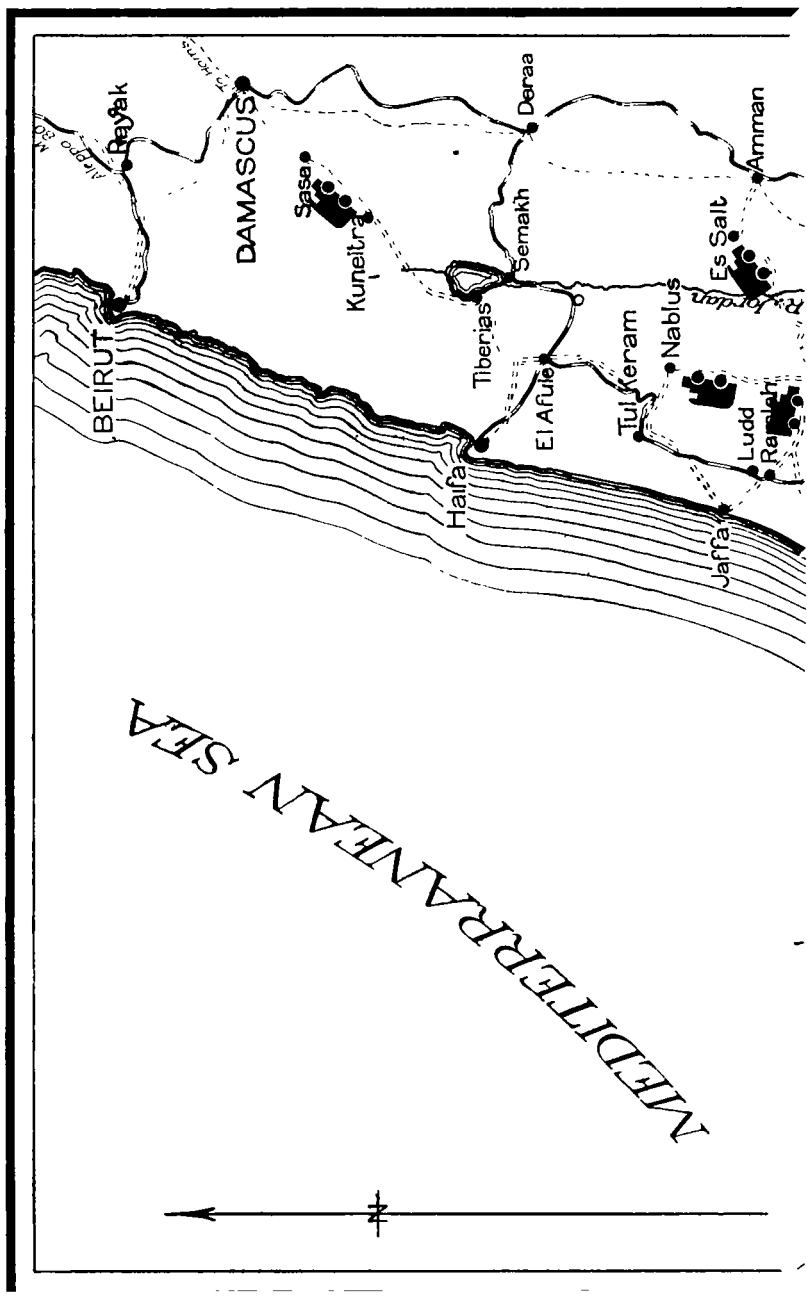
Best of all for Allenby's prospects was the fact that he found the British army in Palestine ripe for a new Commander-in-Chief. The force hailed its new leader with enthusiasm. Allenby came, so far as the troops in Palestine knew, with a brilliant, untarnished reputation. Every man in southern Palestine had read and talked of his great work when, as the leader of the heroic cavalry division in France during the opening days in 1914, he had covered the retreat of French's hard-pressed little army across the fields and down the highways and by-ways to the dramatically decisive turning-point south of the Marne. Subsequently, as commander of the Third Army in France, Allenby's success had been indifferent. His fiery, impulsive, driving temperament, which, combined with his big voice, earned him the name of "The Bull," was ill-suited for leadership in the grim, dark

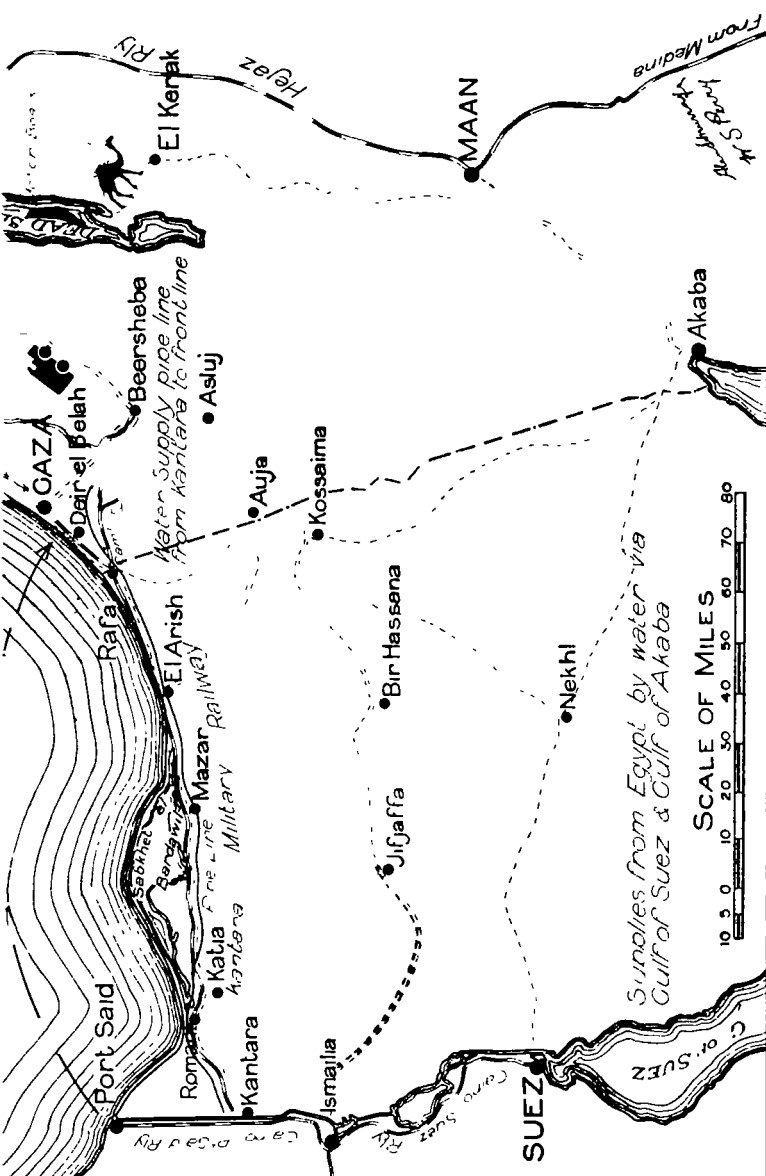
days on the Western Front when the advance on either side was limited, even under the most favourable conditions, by the range of the artillery barrage. But at that time of close censorship news travelled slowly from one British army to another, and the forces in Palestine knew nothing of Arras and its sequel, in which Allenby, sharing the fate of most British army leaders at that stage of the war, failed to maintain his shining record of 1914.

Palestine, too, was essentially a field for the leadership of a great cavalryman, and this fact was realised by even the infantry divisions. So far all or nearly all the successful work had been done by the mounted arms, and the foot-soldiers had an admiration amounting almost to worship for the hardy mounted troops who had cleared Sinai, won Magdhaba and Rafa, surrounded Gaza on March 26th, and on April 19th, fighting dismounted, had so recklessly gambled their lives on the deadly slopes leading up to the Beersheba road. On two or three occasions the Lowlanders of the 52nd Division demonstrated their appreciation of the Anzacs in a very pretty manner. After the grim fight at Bir el Abd, they had lustily cheered the horsemen as they returned to their camps at Romani; and when the New Zealanders and light horsemen rode into El Arish after their sparkling achievement at Rafa, the Scots, including one of their battalion commanders, spontaneously turned out of their tents and forged a new link in the Imperial chain by pumping water for the thirsty horses.

All arms and all ranks, therefore, greeted Allenby with delight and high expectation. And if his coming was welcomed with much enthusiasm, Allenby immediately did things which made him, long before his assault on the Gaza-Beersheba position, the admiration of his whole army. His first decisive action, which was to give entirely new life to the campaign, was to remove his headquarters from the Savoy Hotel in Cairo to the front line area at Kelab, a few miles north of Rafa. That proceeding not only brought him within a short motor-drive of every point of his extended trenches, but naturally exercised an instant effect upon the efficiency of his headquarters staff. Murray's staff worked in luxurious offices at the Savoy, and lived at fashionable hotels or in

MAP





BRITISH AND TURKISH LINES OF COMMUNICATION PRIOR TO ALLENBY'S ATTACK ON GAZA, OCTOBER, 1917.

comfortable quarters, very often with their wives and families, in the seductive city, with the famous playground at Ghezireh, which was always overrun with officers, close at hand; it was impossible that they could apply to the affairs of the campaign that intimate knowledge and fierce energy which are as essential to victory as sagacity and valour in the field. The army applauded the move. Still more did it applaud the resolution of the Commander-in-Chief not only to know in detail the units of his army and their trenches and posts, but also to learn by personal observation all there was to be learned about the positions of the enemy. Great soldiers have rarely stood aloof from their rank and file, or failed to show personal concern for their welfare. Even Wellington, with all his iron, could in the hour of his greatest victory be moved to tears by the sight of his English dead. "I could not count the times I have shaken hands with Allenby," said a light horse brigade-major a few months after the new leader's arrival. "Between the Canal and Gaza I never set eyes on Murray." By such differences in personal bearing and policy have many battles been won and lost.

But there was nothing familiar about Allenby's touch with his regiments and battalions. He went through the hot, dusty camps of his army like a strong, fresh, reviving wind. He would dash up in his car to a light horse regiment, shake hands with a few officers, inspect hurriedly, but with a sure eye to good and bad points, the horses of, perhaps, a single squadron, and be gone in a few minutes, leaving a great trail of dust behind him. His tall and massive, but restlessly active figure, his keen eyes and prominent, hooked nose, his terse and forcible speech, and his imperious bearing, radiated an impression of tremendous resolution, quick decision, and steely discipline. Troops who caught only one fleeting glimpse of him felt that here at last was a man with the natural qualities of a great driving commander, who, given a great task and supplied, as Allenby was, with a great scheme for its accomplishment, would relentlessly force it through to its conclusion. At last they had a commander who would live among them and lead them. Within a week of his arrival Allenby had stamped his personality on the mind of every trooper of the horse and every infantryman of the line.

Nor did the new Commander-in-Chief stop at the forward British positions. Shepherded by the mounted troops and the light car patrols, he pushed boldly out day after day on to the wide No-Man's Land between the two forces on the Beersheba flank, carrying in his mind Chetwode's great plan, checking it in every detail, and searching in vain for something better. Within a few weeks he knew the ground thoroughly from the sea to Beersheba; and every officer and man in his force, applauding his work and inspired by his example and thoroughness, was uplifted with a fresh confidence and resolve. Allenby introduced into the army a new and incalculably improved moral tone. What had hitherto been a rather casual military adventure with no definite goal was suddenly converted into a stern, clear-cut campaign with nothing short of the complete destruction of the Turkish force in Palestine and the capture of Jerusalem as its immediate objective. All ranks were conscious that at last they had emerged from the wilderness, and that the Promised Land was shining before them.

To be stationary opposite a stationary enemy has a lowering effect upon the fighting qualities of troops. After Chetwode had made his defences secure against any likely counter-attack, he had adopted the usual methods of stimulating the interest and activities of his army. These were continued and extended by Allenby. On the Gaza side many infantry raids were made upon the enemy positions—grim, ticklish night enterprises which met with the customary proportion of brilliant successes and costly failure. The mounted men on the flank had a far more attractive field for minor adventure. Day after day troops and squadrons made touch with the Turkish cavalry, and a keen game of wit against wit was played by the two forces of horsemen. The common pastime was attempt at ambush. All officers, including the juniors, were encouraged to submit schemes for fruitful work against the elusive enemy. Both mounted forces patrolled over the same area between the Imleih and the Ghuzze, and the rolling country, although bare of trees, was broken by innumerable little hollows and the beds of water-courses which lent themselves to cover and surprise. Each side, having by observation from a distance marked the times at which patrols passed

certain points, would move on to the ground by night and leave small parties in concealment. As a safeguard against accident these would be supported by troops under cover within striking range. But the measure of success was small. The nervous Turkish cavalry, even when hidden in a favourable position, almost invariably opened fire too soon against our men, so fearful were they that the Australians might by a dash get among them mounted; on the other hand, the Australian ambushes were generally frustrated by Bedouins warning the enemy.

Throughout the campaign the Arabs of western Palestine, as might have been expected, gave their sympathy and support to the side which they from time to time considered to be winning. They were not in the least concerned about the national aspirations and military operations of the Sherif of the Hejaz. The campaign in Palestine meant for them the holding up of their primitive cultivation, the destruction of their crops, and a standing menace to their little flocks. Constant petty thieving and the looting of the successive battlegrounds afforded them a slight compensation; but very little of the material which they collected after the fighting was of the least value to them. They served both forces in turn according to circumstance. After the Gaza engagements they were convinced that the British were losing, and openly ranged themselves on the side of the Turks. The enemy supplied them with rifles, money, and rations, used them extensively on mounted outpost work, and gave them armed protection in the harvesting of their crops on the unoccupied country between the two wadys. Their fighting capacity was merely nominal; but they served a useful purpose in giving warnings of the advance of Chauvel's mounted men, and as the British troops rarely fired upon them unless they first used their rifles, they continued in the work throughout the summer.

Occasionally the little schemes of Australians against Turks were rewarded. One night a few light horsemen of the 4th Regiment, leaving their horses near Karm, and led by Major G. J. Rankin,² concealed themselves in a mud hut at Khasif past which the Turkish patrols frequently

² Maj.-Gen. G. J. Rankin, D S O, V.D. Commanded 4th L.H. Regt. for short periods, 1917/18. Farmer; b. Rochester, Vic., 1 May, 1887.

moved. Meanwhile the remainder of the squadron took up a position in the fold of the neighbouring hills as a supporting force. During the following morning a regiment of Turks rode down towards the hut, and were engaged and driven off by the covering squadron. A little later a Turkish troop about thirty strong advanced towards the hut in column of sections, preceded by two scouts. Rankin allowed the scouts to ride past and then dashed out into the open with his men. The Turks, although outnumbering the Australians by five to one, at once galloped for cover. They had only 300 yards to ride to safety; but so accurate was the light horse shooting at the moving targets, that thirteen Turks and eight horses were killed, and seven men and every other horse wounded.

On another day Major T. H. Bird,³ of the 7th Light Horse Regiment, captured two enemy troops by a smart piece of work near Goz el Geleib. When the Turks appeared, Bird baited them with a light horse troop under Lieutenant G. G. Finlay⁴ and drew them on, while two other light horse troops under Lieutenants J. M. Carter⁵ and C. E. Holland⁶ worked under cover round their flank. The Turks formed for a charge upon Finlay, when the men under Carter and Holland swooped down upon them. The enemy immediately fled, but their miserable little animals were speedily outgalloped by the eager walers. The Australians had neither sword nor lance; taking the Turks by the collar at the gallop, they dragged each man in turn from the saddle, and, having dismounted them all, collected them as prisoners.

If success was rare in these little undertakings, the enemy was constantly in sight, the chance of a coup always present, and the sport was followed with great zest. Sometimes the operations reached larger proportions; one side or the other would demonstrate at brigade and even division strength, guns would be advanced, and considerable shelling

³ Maj. T. H. Bird, D.S.O., 7th L.H. Regt. Farmer and grazier; of East Gresford, N.S.W.; b. Dungog, N.S.W., 10 Apr., 1888.

⁴ Capt. G. G. Finlay, M.C., D.C.M. 7th L.H. Regt. Station manager; b. Grafton, N.S.W., 3 Sept., 1889.

⁵ Lieut. J. M. Carter, M.C., 7th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; of Adjungbilly, N.S.W.; b. Burma, 23 Feb., 1893.

⁶ Lieut. C. E. Holland. Adjutant, 7th L.H. Regt. Station manager; of Forbes, N.S.W.; b. Bondi, Sydney, N.S.W., 5 May, 1885.

exchanged at long ranges. These were never serious undertakings, but were designed merely to gain information, to display strength as a warning against the permanent occupation of the No-Man's Land, and to supply the exercise so necessary to the spirits of officers and men. One little expedition, obviously promoted to encourage adventure in the men, had for its object the placing of a bomb under the rails of the Gaza-Beersheba line at a point fourteen miles deep in the enemy's territory. The 7th Light Horse Regiment, which was entrusted with the task, moved out from Karm early on a dark night in August. Two squadrons having been dropped along the route as covering troops, the third, under Major N. D. Barton,⁷ marching by the stars, reached the railway in the early hours of the morning. Unfortunately the party of engineers who accompanied the squadron found the ground very hard, and considerable time was lost in placing the bomb. As they were about to put it down, a patrol of six Turks, coming up from the south blundered on to Barton's men, challenged and fired. The Australians had orders to use only the steel in case of trouble. Corporal R. G. Moore⁸ instantly dashed at the Turks with his bayonet, and after killing one man fell riddled with enemy bullets. The Australians then opened fire and wounded and captured the remaining Turks. Additional enemy troops were heard approaching, and Barton withdrew his men, who carried the bomb away with them. The expedition, although it accomplished nothing material, serves to show the open nature of the line between the redoubts on the flank, and is a fine example of light horse marching over a strange, rough country in the dark.

The immediate consequence of General Allenby's decision to establish his headquarters with the army in Palestine was the abolition of the Eastern Force command. Allenby was not a man to trust his reputation and the fortunes of his army to any subordinate, no matter how experienced and capable. Before the end of July he had resolved to alter the constitution of his force, a step made possible by the arrival of fresh

⁷ Lieut.-Col. N. D. Barton, 7th L.H. Regt. Of Nanima Station, Wellington, N.S.W.; b. Wellington, 5 June, 1894.

⁸ Cpl. R. G. Moore (No 925; 7th L.H. Regt.). Farmer; of Manilla, N.S.W.; b. Moore Creek, Tamworth, N.S.W., 22 Sept., 1890. Killed in action, 17 Aug., 1917.

infantry divisions. Desert Column was abolished; Desert Mounted Corps, made up of the three mounted divisions, was formed under Chauvel; the XX Corps under Chetwode included by the end of October the 10th (Irish),⁹ 53rd (Welsh Territorial), 60th (London), and 74th (Dismounted Yeomanry) Divisions; and the XXI Corps under Lieutenant-General E. S. Bulfin,¹⁰ the 52nd (Lowland), the 54th (East Anglian), and the 75th (Territorial and Indian) Infantry Divisions. This gave Allenby three divisions of horse and seven divisions of infantry, in addition to the Camel Brigade and the 7th Mounted Brigade, both of which were usually attached to Desert Mounted Corps.

The new Commander-in-Chief, having adopted Chetwode's scheme, decided that if possible the attack should be made in September. If the line could be broken during that month, he would have before the November rains several weeks of dry weather in which to exploit the initial victory and carry the advance up to Jerusalem. He was, however, in an embarrassing position. To advance some weeks before the rain not only meant almost insuperable difficulties of water-supply but, what was worse, it meant entering upon a serious and possibly a decisive engagement, with many of his troops raw and unacclimatised, with a great number of officers strange to the country, and with his supply of munitions and arrangements generally far short of what he deemed necessary for success. If he delayed beyond September, and so ensured an improved army and the prospects of early storms which would give water to his horses on the flank, he ran the risk of being caught at any time by the heavy autumn rains and bogged in the sticky mud of the maritime plain, an event which would be fatal to his transport and would mean extreme wet and cold in the subsequent attack on Jerusalem. Moreover there was always the possibility that the Turks might upset his plans by an offensive from their side, which, if launched on the Beersheba flank, might easily have frustrated Allenby's

⁹ Reinforcements reached this front as follows: 10th (Irish) and 75th (Territorial and Indian) Divs. during October, 1917; 7th (Indian) Div., March, 1918; 3rd (Lahore) Div., June, 1918; 5th Cavalry Div., July, 1918. The 52nd and 74th (British) Divs. embarked for France in April and May, 1918, respectively.

¹⁰ General Sir E. S. Bulfin, K.C.B., C.V.O. Officer of British Regular Army; b. 6 Nov., 1862. Died, 20 Aug., 1939.

project at least until after the winter season. To attack in September was therefore clearly desirable.

But it was soon made plain to Allenby that he must be content with a later date, and that it would be a sounder policy to take the risk of the November rains, than to accept in September those arising from immature arrangements and an army far from its best. He therefore decided to strike late in October, and to trust to the force of his blow and the rapidity of his pursuit to win through to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line before the rain prevented movement on the maritime plain. Consideration of the situation as it was at that time will show that every hour between August and the end of October had to be crowded with intense and well-directed energy, if an advance was to be made even then with any promise of success.

Allenby's plan of attack, based upon Chetwode's "Notes," was to throw the XX Corps of infantry, four divisions strong, together with Desert Mounted Corps and the Camel Brigade, against the Beersheba flank. At the same time the XXI Corps was to move against the Gaza end of the line. This great project meant that the bulk of the British army would be committed to live and fight on an area which at midsummer was still quite waterless, and which was also without railways or prepared roads for the transport of munitions and supplies. Moreover the attack would only be successful if it came as a complete surprise to the enemy. This implied that all preliminary arrangements for water, rations, and munitions must be kept secret from him, that the actual advance of supplies must be deferred until the last moment, and that instant arrival must then be assured. Furthermore the country to be covered was a bare, rolling plain, without a single plantation, fence, or hedgerow to shelter movements from a watchful, apprehensive enemy and his bold German airmen.

Upon this problem Sir Edmund Allenby concentrated all his singular energy and driving power. Formidable as it was, the task was clear-cut and suited to his masterful personality; and the army, fired by his spirit, served him eagerly and with all its might. The effort, if it was to succeed, must be made at top speed and with the utmost will of every man from the bases at Port Said and Kantara to the firing line. It was

then that Allenby appreciated the depth and soundness of Murray's foundations. The broad-gauge railway from Egypt had some time since reached Belah, 226 kilometres from Kantara and only eleven miles from the enemy's stronghold at Gaza. Pipe-lines from the Sweet-Water Canal were in July at Rafa, giving the troops a daily supply of hundreds of thousands of gallons of filtered, chlorinated water. These steel rails and water-pipes across the Sinai desert, which Murray had bequeathed to his successor, were the key to Palestine. But they were as yet far from the vital Beersheba area, and were inadequate for the needs of the rapidly growing army—which now made up a grand total (including Egyptian labourers) of close upon 200,000 men, in addition to some 20,000 camels, 46,000 horses, 15,000 mules, and a few thousand donkeys, all dependent for foodstuffs upon outside sources and upon water which locally was to be found nowhere on the surface, and off the immediate coast scarcely to be found at all.

A preliminary step was the enlargement and perfection of the base at Kantara, which was developed in magical fashion to a great inland port, capable of berthing several ocean-going liners simultaneously. In this huge mushroom settlement thirty miles of metalled roads were laid down on the heavy sand; various bases, which had hitherto been scattered over northern Egypt, were concentrated there, and a marked improvement made in the handling and despatch of supplies to the advanced army. Simultaneously swarms of happy, singing, hard-working Egyptian labourers, spurred on by enthusiastic engineers, in the heat of the summer months duplicated the desert railway from Kantara as far as Maadan, 136 kilometres from the Canal—a work which had an immediate and substantial effect in the speeding up of supplies.

So much for the bases and the main trunk services. But they brought water, rations, and munitions only as far as the coastal fringe of southern Palestine. While they were being strengthened, Allenby was already giving effect to Chetwode's original proposal to carry railways and pipe-lines as far in the direction of Beersheba as was consistent with the policy of not disclosing his intentions to the enemy. A branch railway was thrown out for twenty-eight kilometres to Gamli



GENERAL SIR EDMUND ALLENBY, COMMANDER OF THE BRITISH ARMY
IN PALESTINE, 1917-19

Photo by H. Walter Barnett

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LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR PHILIP CHETWOOD, COMMANDER OF THE XX BRITISH ARMY CORPS, 1917-19

Photo by Neave London



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL T. E. LAWRENCE, ADVISER TO THE ARAB NORTHERN ARMY.

Just War Museum Official Photo No B2183

At the same time a two-foot-six-inch light-gauge line was laid from Belah for nineteen kilometres along the British side of the Ghuzze. This track was in full view of the enemy and within reach of his guns, but he seldom troubled to shell it. Special companies for railway construction were formed of volunteers from the troops, and included two companies of Australians.

Three wells, yielding 130,000 gallons of water daily, had been developed around Khan Yunis, and further large supplies were tapped at Belah. Those sources, added to the pipe-line supply, were more than adequate for the left front of the army. As a preliminary to providing for the centre and right, the pipe-line was carried from Rafa to Shellal, supplying General Headquarters and the El Fukhari district on the way; another pipe-line was run inland from the Khan Yunis wells through Abasan and Abu Sitta to Abu Bakra. Before Allenby's arrival a group of springs in the Wady Ghuzze at Shellal had been developed by the engineers under General Russell, and yielded nearly 300,000 gallons a day. At Shellal a dam was constructed to hold 500,000 gallons, and a pipe-line was carried forward to Imara. Deep bores were sunk at Mendur and "Dorset House" and connected with the Belah supplies, so that water could be pumped into the advanced trenches south of Gaza.

On the right flank, until October 22nd, no troops or animals were watered on the enemy side of the Ghuzze. But for weeks before that date there was a ceaseless and secret concentration of railroad-building material, pumps, pipe-lines, and other water-bearing appliances at the advanced stations towards the east. Allenby's aim was to collect on his right flank sufficient material to enable the railroad and pipe-line, and the camel-borne fantasses, to march at the heels of the four divisions of the XX Corps when Chetwode moved to the attack on the Beersheba flank. At Shellal alone arrangements were made to fill and load on to camels every hour 2,000 fantasses, each containing ten or twelve gallons of water. All, or nearly all, this supply was intended for the infantry. Chauvel's mounted divisions, in their grand enveloping movement to the south-east were, as we shall see, to plunge into the blue, and, until they won the springs at Beersheba,

to depend for water upon isolated wells scattered over the thirsty countryside.

During this prolonged season of organisation on a gigantic scale, Allenby had not fewer than 20,000 camels, thousands of horses and mules, and 50,000 Egyptian labourers working on the preparations for the flank attack. In addition, the resources of the short inland railroads were strained to their fullest capacity, while the roads were thronged with processions of every kind of transport. Still the movement was kept a close secret from the enemy. By day the area was comparatively quiet; as soon as night fell, it was a wide buzzing hive of surely-directed industry, as train followed train and convoys rolled eastwards in the choking clouds of dust. Thus was the mighty hammer forged.

Not only had Allenby's coming brought to the troops a new driving power and an inspiration. It had also provided the front with certain essentials, hitherto lacking, for a really effective offensive army. Allenby and his shrewd and gifted Chief of Staff, Major-General L. J. Bols,¹¹ after their experience in France, knew what was needed for smashing carefully prepared trenches, and the Commander-in-Chief insisted upon getting them. The British Government, now not only eager to conquer Palestine, but also hoping by the blow there to cripple von Falkenhayn's pending offensive against Baghdad, readily responded. Day after day the great ships at Kantara unloaded big guns, countless shells and other munitions, the latest type of battle-aeroplanes, and every other device calculated to vex and beat down the opposition of an entrenched foe. Every arm in the British force was rapidly being equipped as, on this front, it never had been before; in consequence all ranks were heartened, and confirmed in their first impressions of their new leader. Especially opportune were the reinforcements in aircraft. British and Australian airmen in Palestine were now a remarkably capable body. They had been at work for a long time; their casualties had been relatively light, so that they were, to a degree unusual in the air service, a force of crafty veterans with an exceptional knowledge of the ways of the enemy and of the

¹¹ Lt-Gen Sir L. J. Bols, KCB, KCMG, DSO, psc. Officer of British Regular Army; of Gloucestershire, Eng.; b. Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, 23 Nov., 1867. Died, 13 Sept., 1930.

country over which they flew. They had been trained in a hard school. In the long advance from the Canal they had until now been handicapped by machines always inferior in speed and climbing power to the German aircraft; only their personal superiority, and that singular and strongly marked aptitude of young men of the Anglo-Saxon race for work in the air, had enabled them to survive. Despite their disability, they had served the army with unflinching devotion, and their reward came now in aeroplanes which were for the first time equal, if not superior, to those of the Germans. The new material was limited, and part of the air force, including the Australian No. 1 Squadron, was still obliged to use obsolete machines. But the new battle-craft were sufficient at once to make the Germans respectful at a critical time in operations, when Allenby was anxious above all things to keep enemy pilots and observers from spying over the British lines. After a few fights, in which the Germans were decisively beaten, the foe became very shy and hurried in his reconnaissance, and failed entirely to observe the drift of the British army towards the right flank.

As October approached the troops were put through their final burst of hard training. No preparations, however gigantic and perfect, could remove from the great flank enterprise an element of extreme hazard. Not only were strong enemy positions to be broken down after long marches across waterless country, but they must be broken down in one lightning, overwhelming blow. If Allenby's assault on Beersheba should be arrested for only a few hours, if the element of surprise were lost and the British plan disclosed, it was highly probable that the Turks would be able to maintain their line. Chetwode's corps was therefore given a special final course of training; it was marched and worked until it became as fit as a body of Olympic athletes, and perfected as far as possible in the use of all arms. During this period the troops were also kept on a limited allowance of water, so that in the heavy days ahead they would be accustomed to a scanty supply. The tragic experience of the 42nd Division at Romani demonstrated the necessity for this wise measure. Allenby was taking no risks against which forethought and hard work could provide.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EVE OF BEERSHEBA

IN October the rival armies presented a contrast highly favourable to the invading force. On the British side a resolute, talented, and experienced commander headed an army of seasoned troops in the pink of condition, well fed, perfectly clothed, and adequately munitioned; an army happy in its task and its leadership, and kindled now with that flame of enthusiasm which more than half ensures victory. On the Turkish side the picture was painfully different. The High Command was, in Djemal's hands, inexperienced, divided in its counsels, uncertain in its aim, and irresolute in its actions; the Turkish army was ill-fed, wretchedly clothed, uncertain of its supply of munitions, low in spirit, and weakened morally and physically by a continual leakage of deserters.

Papers captured a year later by a yeomanry brigade at Nazareth gave a vivid picture of the Turks' unfortunate condition during the summer of 1917. They showed that von Falkenhayn, the German leader of the Baghdad expedition, was at dangerous variance with "the mighty Djemal," as Falkenhayn contemptuously calls the Turkish Governor of Syria. They also disclosed the degree to which Allenby's resolute work had disturbed and weakened the whole of the enemy's plans in the Near East. With the British strongly held, and, as it was hoped, decisively checked at Gaza in April, the Young Turk Administration at Constantinople, with their German backers and masters in full support, had resolved to bend their main energies to preparations for the recapture of Baghdad, which had been so brilliantly won by Maude. The undertaking was a heavy one, and called for as much of Turkey's already diminished military resources as could be spared from her many battlefronts. Berlin promised to support the undertaking with a reinforcement consisting of a German infantry brigade which was to be known as the "German Asiatic Column." The German brigade was, in the end, represented by only a few battalions eventually sent to the East. The armies (Sixth and Seventh) intended for Mesopotamia were officially named the "Yilderim

(‘Lightning’) Army Group,” and the operations in that area were placed under the command of von Falkenhayn.

Enver Pasha and Falkenhayn recognised that they could seriously menace Baghdad only if the Palestine front was maintained without adding materially to the Turkish army in that theatre. As the summer advanced, and Allenby was appointed to the British command; as the Turks learned—and they speedily did—of the strong reinforcements to the British army; and as it became clear that a serious offensive was contemplated, the Turco-German leaders were faced by a problem very difficult to solve. If they substantially strengthened their army in Palestine, they must abandon the expedition against Baghdad; if they risked an overthrow between Gaza and Beersheba, they would be threatened by a great advance of Chauvel’s mounted troops, which might not cease until it reached Aleppo, cut the Baghdad railway, and threatened the Mesopotamia army with isolation and destruction.

Enver Pasha, in a telegram from Constantinople on August 23rd to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, summed up the position in Palestine, and showed a sound appreciation of the danger threatened by Allenby. He pointed out that “the preservation of the Sinai front is a primary condition to the success of the Yilderim (Baghdad) undertaking.” Djemal Pasha, he said, was satisfied that if his force at Gaza could be reinforced by one division he would be safe against any attack the British could make. Von Falkenhayn, however, did not agree with Djemal, but urged stronger reinforcements, and also recommended “that we on our side should attack the British, and, as far as possible, surprise them, before they are strengthened.” At the same time von Falkenhayn was opposed to any reduction of the forces intended for the operations against Baghdad. Enver therefore asked Hindenburg to sanction the withdrawal from the Dobrudja of the VI Turkish Army Corps for service in Asia. This would ensure the safety of Palestine and make possible the attack on Baghdad. “For the moment my decision is,” added Enver, “defence of Syria by strengthening that front by one infantry division, and prosecution of the Yilderim scheme.” In conclusion, Enver expressed his willingness to take up again

von Falkenhayn's proposed attack on the British, should the prospects for such a venture be good.

On August 25th von Falkenhayn, in a despatch from Constantinople to German General Headquarters (in Europe), strongly urged the desirability of an attack on Allenby before the British leader had time to strike. It is obvious from this telegram that, although Turkey was so largely under German influence, Enver Pasha was not disposed to quarrel with the troublesome and influential Djemal, and that the latter's advice prevailed with the Young Turks. This fact Falkenhayn fully appreciated. "I am fully convinced," he said, "that as soon as it comes to a question of the expected attack on the Sinai front, or if the Fourth Army feels itself only seriously threatened, further troops, munitions, and material will be withdrawn from the army group, and Turkey's forces will be shattered. Then nothing decisive can be undertaken in either theatre of war. The sacrifice of men, money, and material which Germany is offering at the present moment will be in vain. The treatment of the question is rendered all the more difficult because I cannot rid myself of the impression that the decision of the Turkish High Command is based far less on military exigencies than on personal motives. It is dictated with one eye on the mighty Djemal, who deprecates a definite decision, but yet, on the other hand, opposes the slightest diminution of the area of his command. Consequently, as the position now stands, I consider the Irak (Baghdad) undertaking practicable only if it is given the necessary freedom for retirement through the removal of the danger on the Syrian front. The removal of this danger I regard as only possible through attack."

But Djemal was in the saddle in Palestine, as Falkenhayn admitted, and his opposition was due, among other reasons, to the fact that the scheme was urged by the Germans. Djemal, an indifferent soldier himself, was intensely jealous of German interference with his Syrian command. He appreciated German and Austrian assistance in munitions, aircraft, artillery, machine-guns, transport, and other technical services, which alone made the campaign possible; but he bitterly resented the presence and advice of Falkenhayn and other German leaders. Swollen with pride after the Gaza achieve-

ments, he was at this time gratifying his sensual nature by playing the part, in a very shoddy fashion, of a victorious Asiatic despot of the great full days of old. He lived and moved with some show of pomp, gave full rein to his passionate temper, and gratified his baser appetites. Strong at Constantinople, he was an ugly obstacle to German diplomacy, strategy, and tactics; maintaining his influence, he made impossible the safety of Palestine.

General von Kressenstein, now the commander of the Fourth Army in Palestine, in a letter written to Yilderim headquarters in September, gave a dismal account of the condition of the Turkish troops on the Gaza-Beersheba front. He deplored the constant desertions, and urged an energetic hunt for deserters between the battlefront and the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, and the punishment of offenders. He feared that this leakage, with its evil moral effect on the whole army, would increase with the coming of winter. He went on to disclose what was, doubtless, the main cause of disaffection among the troops. "The question of rationing," he wrote, "has not been settled. We are living continually from hand to mouth." He pointed out that "binding promises" had been made by the responsible higher authorities that from "now on 150 tons of rations should arrive regularly each day. Yet between the 24th and the 27th of September a total of 229 tons—or only 75 tons per diem—have arrived. . . . The Headquarters Fourth Army has received the highly gratifying order that, at least up to the imminent decisive battle, the bread ration be raised to 100 grammes. This urgently necessary improvement to the men's rations remains illusory if a correspondingly larger quantity of flour (about one waggon per day) is not supplied to us. So far the improvement exists only on paper. The condition of the animals particularly gives cause for anxiety. Not only are we about 5,000 animals short of establishment, but, as a result of exhaustion, a considerable number of animals are ruined daily. The waggons of provisions are incapable of operating, on account of the shortage of animals. The ammunition supply, too, is gradually coming into question, on account of the deficiency in animals. The menacing danger can only be met by a regular supply of sufficient fodder. The stock of straw in the area of operations is exhausted."

Von Kressenstein also pointed out that, when the wet season came, the railway would be interrupted "again and again for periods of from eight to fourteen days. There are also days and weeks in which the motor-lorry traffic has to be suspended." He consequently urged that at least fourteen days' reserve of rations should be deposited at dépôts at the front as early as possible.

Early in October, therefore, when Allenby was completing his arrangements for attack, the outlook for the Turkish army was indifferent. The enemy had a superb natural position, and clever and powerful artificial defences. But his leadership was chaotic, and his supplies were short and unassured. Had Allenby been opposing almost any other troops in the world but the obstinate, long-suffering, self-sacrificing soldiers of Turkey, his task might have been one calling for little more than a strong demonstration. But, as this and many other campaigns proved again and again, the Ottoman rank and file will fight doggedly and dangerously under incredibly bad conditions. The defending army between the sea and Beersheba was, with all its disabilities, still formidable. It was outnumbered by two to one by a force which was, by all recognised military standards, immeasurably its superior man for man and arm for arm. But, placed on its unrivalled defensive position, it would fight, as its leaders knew, with determination to the finish. There could be no greater tribute to the Turkish soldier than that the British High Command, with its daily contact and its superior intelligence, had no suspicion of the state of affairs revealed by the papers captured in 1918 at Nazareth; nor in the fighting which followed did the British troops realise that the foe who so strongly opposed them, first on the entrenched line and afterwards with his admirably maintained rear-guard, was in a plight which troops from the British Islands or the Dominions must have found fatal to their spirit and usefulness.

The enemy fully expected Allenby's offensive, and believed the blow would fall late in October or early in November. The Germans had little hope that the shock could be successfully resisted by mere passive defence. Djemal alone maintained that view. Enver listened first to the counsels of

Falkenhayn and then to the counsels of Djemal. Meanwhile the summer slipped away, and October was well advanced before Enver decided to divert substantial forces from the Mesopotamia expedition, and send them to anticipate and frustrate Allenby's assault by a Turkish offensive. But this decision came too late. The enemy's regiments were slowly trickling down over the congested railway and bad roads from Aleppo, and were still some weeks distant from the Gaza-Beersheba line, when the British commander was moving to the attack. Two Turkish divisions, the 19th and 26th, reached the front before the battle opened, and another, the 20th, was on the way; but these were quite inadequate to ensure the policy of active defence so strongly urged by the Germans.

But the main weakness of the Turkish situation was not in the enforced policy of a passive defensive. Neither Djemal nor the German leaders believed it possible for Allenby to fling in his chief strength on the Beersheba flank. Their utter ignorance of the British preparations on that flank is almost incredible, and is a fine tribute to the secrecy and energy which marked Allenby's effort. The Turkish dispositions in October, which were fully known to the British leader, showed that the blow was expected on the Gaza, or coastal, sector. The enemy's main reserve, made up of the 7th and 19th Infantry Divisions, was in camp behind Gaza. Allenby succeeded in inducing the belief that he would attack Gaza with his main force, combining the attack with a landing from the sea north of the town, so as to take the Turks in rear and threaten their communications. These miscalculations of the enemy were prejudicial in themselves, and the situation was further endangered by steps taken late in October to re-organise the Turkish forces. The Seventh and Eighth Armies, which were then brought into being, were not fully completed, and the new army leaders and their staffs lacked any such grasp of their commands as was to be desired in the crisis then pending.

Allenby's battle order was issued on October 22nd. The scheme outlined by Chetwode in June was followed in all its main principles. Chetwode, with XX Corps, was to strike at Beersheba from the south-west, while Chauvel, with two divisions of Desert Mounted Corps, was to assault the town

from the east and north-east. This combined assault was to take place on October 31st; but four days earlier the artillery of Bulfin's XXI Corps, on the left, was to begin bombarding the Gaza defences. This shelling was to be increased in intensity from day to day, and, in conjunction with navy activity from the sea, was designed to persuade the enemy that Gaza was Allenby's main objective. Two British monitors, armed with 6-inch guns and protected by French destroyers, were to shell the Gaza defences on October 30th and 31st. On the following day H.M.S. *Raglan* and the French battleship *Requin* were to bombard Deir Sineid station, a few miles behind Gaza, and other railway points, roads, and bridges in the neighbourhood; one monitor, armed with 9.2-inch guns, was to open on the positions at Sheikh Redwan.

During the few days before the battle two sham preparations were made for a landing on the coast about the mouth of the Wady Hesi. The navy pushed in and took soundings. A fleet of small craft appeared off Belah, in view of the Turks, and a body of British infantry was marched towards the beach just before nightfall. At dawn next morning the battleships opened a bombardment off the mouth of the Hesi, and the fleet of small craft had disappeared from Belah. The enemy's belief that Gaza was to be the scene of the real attack might well have been strengthened by this pretty game of bluff. At the same time similar steps were taken to prevent the enemy from bringing down his garrison troops from Syria. The scheme devised by Murray for use in Cyprus before Romani was revived. A great camp was laid out on the island, buoys put down to direct transports, preliminary inquiries made among local contractors for supplies for a large force, and other arrangements made that were sure to stimulate speculation and gossip among the Cypriotes. How far these schemes were successful it is not possible to say; but Allenby was achieving his purpose, and in the closing days of October the enemy was confident that Gaza was to be assailed by the full force of the British army. Even on October 29th—when Allenby's flank movement, despite all precautions, could be concealed no longer—the Turkish High Command recorded the following appreciation:—"An out-flanking movement on Beersheba, with about one infantry and

one cavalry division, is indicated; but the main attack, as before, must be expected on the Gaza front." One strong factor in the deception of the Turks was undoubtedly the work undertaken by Chauvel's mounted troops on the Beersheba flank late in the summer, when vigorous reconnaissances, often a division strong, were carried close up to Beersheba, their purpose being to accustom the Turks to demonstrations there which had no serious aim.

In all his orders Allenby insisted that Beersheba must be captured on the first day of the operations. Surprise and rapidity of movement were indispensable to success. If the enemy, with his extreme left lightly held, and his main force concentrated towards the sea on his right, could not be swiftly overwhelmed at Beersheba, he would have time to readjust his army, meet strength with strength at the threatened points, and perhaps maintain his line. The British plan was that, as soon as Beersheba had fallen, Bulfin, with troops of the XXI Corps, should attack strongly over the sand-dunes between Gaza and the sea; Chetwode, on the other flank, would then swing his divisions obliquely towards the north-west against the Turkish strongholds at Sheria and Hareira. Chauvel, with his mounted troops, was to push northwards on Chetwode's right flank, and, as a preliminary, seize Nejile, where there was a good supply of water; then, riding north-west, he must threaten the whole of the Turkish communications and menace the army round Gaza. Simultaneously with this second phase on the right, Bulfin, with the XXI Corps, was to throw forward his right, pin the enemy in the Atawineh district, and then hack his way through Gaza—an undertaking which should then be possible, owing to the expected rush of Turkish troops to meet the British advance on the east. The move of the XX Corps towards Beersheba at the outset left a weakly-held gap between Chetwode and Bulfin; to guard against a Turkish counter here, the Yeomanry Mounted Division, under Barrow, and the Camel Brigade, were to remain at Shellal in reserve.

To guard as far as possible against enemy observation, Allenby finally arranged for a constant patrol of airmen during the last week in October. The pilots flew in turn from early morning until dark, so that during this critical period the

German was allowed to see little or nothing of the preliminary movements of the British army.

Allenby, although a leader of autocratic temperament, at this time freely consulted all the best brains in his force. The final plans were the outcome of innumerable conferences between the Commander-in-Chief and his experienced corps commanders. Chauvel's mission, though it could be explained in a few words, was a difficult one, even for the great mounted force of veteran troops and seasoned horses under his command. He was by dawn on October 31st to have the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions on the east and south-east of Beersheba, ready to strike simultaneously at the town and at the old road that leads northwards along the top of the Judæan hills to Hebron and Jerusalem. He was to reach that position unknown to the enemy, with his horses fairly fresh from water and capable of at least one day's hard work without a drink. Water was, as it always had been since leaving the Canal, the main problem. Seven thousand camels were concentrated about Shellal to carry supplies in fantasses for the operations, but they were intended for the infantry. Chauvel on his long march must find water on the thirsty countryside.

After reconnaissance by small mounted bodies, it was decided that the only route open to his two mounted divisions was to march south-east from Shellal by Esani to Khalasa, fourteen miles south-west of Beersheba, and to Asluj, sixteen miles directly south of Beersheba. The journal of the Palestine Exploration Fund disclosed to General Russell (commanding the Desert Mounted Corps Engineers) that Khalasa, the Eleusa of the ancient Greeks, had been a city of some sixty thousand people, and that Asluj had also been a town of importance. Chauvel had, therefore, ordered a search for water at these places during the raid on the Asluj-Auja railway in May; as a result of this, it was estimated that ten days' work by the engineers would revive the old wells sufficiently to provide water for the two mounted divisions, and enable Beersheba to be assailed from the south and east.

As a preliminary to the advance of the infantry, the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment had on October 25th seized

a series of low ridges near the Wady Hanafish. Here, on Hills 720, 630, and 510, the Australians dug small redoubts, facing the great enemy position at Hareira. This line covered the preliminary advance of the XX Corps, and for the first time gave the British permanent possession of a large tract of country which hitherto had been No-Man's Land. The Turks resented the intrusion, and early on the morning of October 27th fell, in greatly superior numbers, on a regiment of Middlesex Yeomanry of the 8th Brigade, who had taken over the line from the Australians. The yeomanry, who were dismounted, held Hill 630 with a squadron, and Hill 720 with three troops, and also had a post at El Buggar. On Hill 630, although assailed by a force estimated at 2,000, they resisted gallantly and successfully all day; but on Hill 720, where the enemy advanced 1,200 cavalry, supported by artillery and machine-guns, the defenders, after beating back two charges, were overwhelmed and almost entirely destroyed. In the afternoon the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and two brigades of the 53rd Infantry Division were sent forward in support, and the Turks retired, leaving the posts in British hands. The fine fight of the yeomanry had prevented the enemy from establishing himself in strength on ground where he might have offered an effective resistance to Chetwode's men in the days which followed.

By October 20th all was ready for the movement of Chauvel's and Chetwode's forces towards the right flank. Divisions and brigades which had been in camps towards the beach, began night-marches to the east, followed by working parties, which were to establish dumps and to develop water in the forward areas. Water in great quantities was carried by camels to Esani, and the Australian and New Zealand field engineers, assisted by the men of the Camel Brigade, engaged in the development of the water-supply at Khalasa. All troops marched in the dark, and during the day kept as quiet as possible in dry wadys and in the occasional pockets of the rolling plain-country. The camps which they had evacuated were left standing; fires were lighted in them at night, and lights burned in the tents. To the men of an army such tricks as these always appear futile, and are the subject of constant jest; but, as the campaign often proved, they invari-

ably deceive an enemy unless his intelligence is exceptionally rapid and accurate.

Chetwode's advanced brigades and the railway construction companies worked ceaselessly for a week in carrying forward the railways and the water-supply. By October 28th one branch of the railway towards Beersheba was completed to Imara, and carried thence to a point slightly north-east of Karm, while another branch was constructed from Gamli to Karm by Khasif. A supply of water was developed at Esani, Maalaga, and Abu Ghalyun, and 60,000 gallons were carried by night and stored in the old cisterns around Khasif and Im Siri for subsequent use by the infantry. On the night of October 24th Ryrie, with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, moved from Esani to Asluj, as advance-guard to the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions. Both at Khalasa and Asluj the well-water was abundant and of good quality; but the masonry had been shattered to a considerable depth, and the destroyed wells were found filled with earth and great masses of concrete. The light horsemen of Ryrie's brigade, working in co-operation with the Australian and New Zealand engineers, carried enthusiasm and great energy into their task at Asluj. Throughout the war the Australian, in competition with the men of other lands, won a reputation as a remarkably clever and efficient labourer. At Anzac, in France, and in Palestine, he excelled in capacity to complete great tasks rapidly and well, and at Asluj it was so with the light horsemen. After a rough, dusty night-ride from Esani, strong working parties were turned on to the wells immediately after their arrival. Each man knew that the "zero" day for which he had been waiting so eagerly was close at hand, and that no move could be made against Beersheba until the demolished wells at Asluj were daily yielding water sufficient for many thousands of men and horses. As the clearing and sinking continued, the men worked up to their waists in mud and water. At the outset it was found necessary to send back the horses of two regiments to Khalasa; but by the 29th the wells were clear, with a strong and good flow; the necessary pumps had been installed; great lengths of canvas troughing and large canvas reservoirs had been established, and a limited supply of water was available for most of the men and horses

of Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions. Allenby's thorough personal supervision of every important feature of his preparations was well illustrated by his visit to the well-sinking parties at Khalasa and Asluj; nor did the troops neglect to notice that the Commander-in-Chief had, at that critical, anxious time, covered the rough, dusty country between headquarters and Asluj. If they had worked cheerfully before his visit, after his coming and his warm applause of their efforts they were prepared to work and fight like demons in the service of this new leader, who, if he was a hard master, never spared himself.

Chauvel reached Asluj with Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters on the afternoon of the 30th, and arrangements were completed for the night ride of about twenty-five miles, which was designed to place the six brigades within striking distance of Beersheba at dawn. General Allenby's plan demanded that the town should be captured and the enemy's left flank crushed within twenty-four hours of the move from Asluj; the horsemen were thus faced with a great day's fighting, following a night in the saddle over exceedingly rough country. But Chauvel could have had no misgivings about the capacity of his troops. In the sheer quality of their grand young manhood, in their brigade and regimental leadership, in their experience gained over eighteen months' hard fighting in all sorts of rough conditions, the men of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Brigade were then without peer among mounted troops engaged anywhere in the war. Of the Australian Mounted Division, the men of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade were veterans like the Anzacs; and the yeomanry of 5th Mounted Brigade, if their performance in Sinai had not been altogether satisfactory, were now, under sound leadership, to be counted as first-class British cavalry. The 4th Light Horse Brigade had fought convincingly at the second Gaza engagement.

Both the 3rd and 4th Brigades were under new leaders. Meredith, who had commanded the 1st Brigade with so much distinction in its critical fight at Romani, and had afterwards led the 4th, had been invalided home to Australia, and was succeeded by William Grant, of the 11th Regiment. The new brigadier, like so many

of Australia's commanders in the war, was a Queenslander. A surveyor and pastoralist from Darling Downs, he had learned on the wide plains that bush-craft which made him famous in Sinai as a guide on night marches over the maze of sand-dunes. Somewhat more excitable and impulsive than most of the light horse leaders, Grant possessed the temperament for the exploit, to be narrated later, which was to give lasting distinction to his name. On October 30th Lachlan Chisholm Wilson, who since the beginning in Sinai had led the 5th Light Horse Regiment with marked sagacity and dash, took over the lead of the 3rd Brigade from Royston. The departure of the heroic South African, who was given leave to return to his home on urgent personal business, was deeply regretted by all ranks. Fiery and reckless in action, and with a personality generous and lovable, Royston won a place in the hearts of the Australians not reached by any of their own light horse leaders. Wilson, like Grant, was a Queenslander, but he was not a countryman. A Brisbane solicitor, he was an outstanding example of a number of Australian city men who won distinction in the light horse. His days had been spent chiefly in law-courts and offices. Grant, tall and wiry, was the accepted type of the Australian countryside; Wilson, short and round, carried the stamp of the man who had lived a sedentary life. Wilson's appearance and bearing were always in contrast to the confident, dashing, picturesque men he led. He was shy in manner and very sparing of speech; but his quiet figure concealed the spirit of a great master of horse, and between the time of his promotion to brigadier and his dramatic, unpremeditated dash through Damascus as the vanguard of the British and Arab armies a year later, he became marked as a leader capable of handling a command far more important than a brigade. Like nearly all the light horse leaders, he had learned his soldiering in South Africa, where he had served as a trooper.

As the great force streamed eastward during this week, it seemed inevitable that the enemy must learn of the movement. The nights were illuminated by a moon almost at the full, and the dust-clouds arising from the columns could be clearly seen for miles. Chauvel's two divisions alone demanded a huge convoy of supplies and munitions. On the

night of the 28th a transport column six miles long moved from near Tel el Fara, by Esani, to Khalasa and Asluj. It contained upwards of 300 four-wheeled vehicles, in addition to thousands of camels and other pack animals; but, impressive as it was, it represented only a unit in the vast machine which Allenby was now setting in motion. The field management of this transport for the Desert Mounted Corps on the flank, and in all the subsequent operations in Palestine and Syria, was in the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Stansfield,¹ who before the war was a subordinate officer of the Queensland State Railways. Stansfield displayed between Kantara and Aleppo an organising talent of the highest order.

While the 2nd Light Horse Brigade was working on the wells at Asluj, the Australians met for the first time a detachment of their allies, the Arabs of the Hejaz. This party, a few hundred strong, was under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Newcombe, one of the few British officers engaged at this time in romantic and hazardous exploits with the picturesque men of the desert. Newcombe was to move on Chauvel's right flank, and, after the capture of Beersheba, to harass the retreating enemy on the road to Hebron. The light horsemen greeted the Arabs with keen curiosity. Remarkable stories of their successful adventures against the Turks had come across country from the south-east. Many places of importance had been captured in the Hejaz; but lack of sufficient explosives and skilled engineers, together with the great superiority of the Turks as fighting men, prevented the isolation of Medina. As fast as the Arabs demolished sections of the railway, they were restored by the Turks, who, so long as they were a few hundred strong, and possessed machine-guns, had nothing to fear from the wild men of the desert. Lieutenant-Colonel T. E. Lawrence² then developed his famous campaign of harassing the enemy's communications over prolonged stretches of railway. Many troop-trains in motion were blown up by bombs, whereupon the Arabs would swoop down from the ambush, and destroy or capture the passengers. This "national pastime" appealed

¹ Lieut.-Col. W. Stansfield, C.M.G., D.S.O. Asst. Dir. of Supply and Transport Des. Mtd. Corps, 1917/19. Railway employee; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Todmorden, Yorks, Eng., 19 Nov., 1877.

² Lieut.-Col. T. E. Lawrence, C.B., D.S.O. Adviser on Arab affairs, Middle East Division, Colonial Office, 1921/22. Historian; b. Wales, 15 Aug., 1888. Died of injuries, 19 May, 1935. (Changed name by deed poll in 1927 to T. E. Shaw.)

greatly to the district tribesmen, who were always prepared to fight for a price paid down in advance in British gold, provided that all the odds were on their side. A more ambitious enterprise was the rushing of the port of Akaba by a force under Lawrence, in July, 1917, which cleared the way for the indefinite extension of raids along the railway northwards towards eastern Palestine.

Lawrence's unexpected and impressive success at Akaba had a remarkable effect upon these emotional tribesmen. This singular young Englishman had already won an influence such as had never hitherto been enjoyed in modern times by an alien over the reserved, suspicious men of southern Arabia. An Oxford don, he had as a youngster gone to Syria to gratify an exceptional appetite for archæology; he had quickly acquired a remarkable mastery of the Arabic language and dialects, and, moved by a passion for adventure and a love of power, had dipped deeply into the higher politics of the Turkish Empire. Fascinated by the mediæval splendour of the Arab people, he dreamed of a modern revival of the race, and before the outbreak of war had established himself in close personal touch with the men of the Hejaz. When the war began, he hastened to Cairo, and was employed as a subaltern in Maxwell's Intelligence Branch. His deep and intimate knowledge of the Arab people soon attracted the notice of his superior officers, who marvelled at the amazing career and the wisdom of this fair, slight young man with the gentle voice, pleasant manners, and drooping shoulders of one accustomed from boyhood to pore over books. They found it hard to believe that this soft-looking student of twenty-six, who was conspicuous, to those who did not know him, chiefly because of his carelessness as to his military dress, could possibly have any influence among the Arabian tribesmen.

After the fall of Akaba the activities of the Hejaz men grew bolder and wider. Feisal, one of the sons of Hussein, commanding the Arab Northern Army with Lawrence, Newcombe, and other British officers, raided the railway frequently and vigorously up to Maan and beyond. As the campaign continued, the strange influence of Lawrence became more and more pronounced. The northern tribes were usually

jealous and suspicious of the men of the Hejaz, but the genius of the young Englishman, and the irresistible power of his gold, brought tribe after tribe to the assistance of the Allied cause. The personal risk was small, and the pay was high. The Arabs everywhere received in place of their ancient muzzle-loading weapons modern rifles and great supplies of ammunition; the flow of gold gave them riches, and the raids promised them easy plunder. Some of their swoops were remarkably successful. In September, 1917, Lawrence destroyed a bridge and derailed a train on the railway near Maan, killed two German officers and sixty-eight Turks, and took eighty Turks prisoner. The larger Turkish garrisons at Deraa, Amman, Maan, and Medina were never in danger; but the enemy was vexed and harassed over hundreds of miles of precarious communications, and was compelled to move his forces and supplies, even on the railway, in large and strongly protected parties.

The men who rode into Asluj with Newcombe were typical of all the Arabs afterwards met by the Australians during the war. Tall, lithe, handsome, black-bearded fellows, they rode their camels and ponies with an easy grace; armed to excess with service rifles, knives, and swords, they impressed the Australians with their fierce, war-like appearance. The light horsemen had yet to learn their fighting quality, but were pleased to know that in the coming battle they were to have allies on their flank who showed such promise as irregular campaigners.

CHAPTER XXIII

BATTLE OF BEERSHEBA

IN the assault upon Beersheba the divisions of XX Corps were to strike north-east between the Khalasa-Beersheba road on their right and the railway on their left. The Wady Saba, after clearing the town on its way from the east to the Ghuzze, ran through this sector on the railway side. While the 60th and 74th Divisions advanced on the Turkish ring of defences between the wady and the Khalasa road, troops of the 53rd Division were to smash the defences north of the wady. This attack was intended to draw the main strength of the Turkish garrison to oppose the British infantry, and thus to let Chauvel's mounted men enter the practically unopposed town from the east. The enemy held Beersheba with his 27th Division, reinforced by a few battalions from the 16th and 24th Division; his defences extended from Tel el Saba on the Wady Saba, east of the town, through a series of detached groups of trenches round the south and south-west. These earthworks were placed on commanding positions with good zones of fire; but on the east and south they were not protected by wire, and as trenches they were inferior to those on the Turkish line further west. The Turks had clearly reckoned on the safety which the absence of water on the British side apparently gave to the town; they were prepared for a raid with "about one infantry and one cavalry division," but they were not ready for such a force as Allenby was speeding forward on the night of October 30th.

The village of modern Beersheba in itself offers no facilities for a prolonged defence. It lies in a shallow saucer at the foot of the Judæan hills, which rise abruptly from its outskirts to the north, with high ground also to the east and south-east. Before the war Beersheba was a squalid trading-centre, linking up the hinterland with the port of Gaza, and a distributing-centre for camels. In the operations against Sinai it was constantly used by the enemy as a base; many new temporary buildings arose, and the town became the scene of much activity. As the Anzacs first saw it from the

hills to the south-east at sunrise on the morning of the 31st, it had, except for its new mosque built by the Germans, the appearance of a struggling township on the pastoral country in Australia. To the dusty ring of mounted campaigners it promised no prize in comfortable quarters or in foodstuffs. But it contained that which was still more essential and coveted, for the village was rich in springs of good water. Perhaps never since the far-off days of Abraham had the water in the old wells of the patriarchs been so needed by parched men riding in from the southern desert.

Chauvel's orders, when he moved from Asluj early on the evening of the 30th, were twofold. He was to straddle the Beersheba road—which leads up through Judæa to Hebron and Jerusalem—at Sakati, some six miles north-east of the town, and so both prevent reinforcements from coming in from that direction, and also cut off escape from the town. That road closed, he was to storm Beersheba. His march from Asluj lay over barren, stony hills. The tracks off the main road between Asluj and Beersheba were but faintly marked and troublesome to follow, and the going was severe on the horses. The 7th Light Horse Regiment of the 2nd Brigade, as advance-guard to the corps, cleared Asluj at 6 p.m. and led the long column of the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions north-east along the track to Bir Arara, which was reached at 2 a.m. on the 31st. The Australian Mounted Division moved from Khalasa, and, marching by Asluj, had some miles further to travel than the Anzacs. All the men carried three days' rations; but the horses, despite their great loads, were touched with excitement, as they always were when marching in large bodies, and fretted on their bridle-reins as they stepped briskly over the harsh country. Smoking was as usual forbidden, and any talking was in subdued tones. But the bare hills sounded with the beat of thousands of shod horses, and sparks struck from the stones marked the direction of the trusty flank guards.

At Thaffha the track split. While the 2nd Brigade under Ryrice, which was aiming for Sakati, pressed on to Bir Arara, the main column, with the Wellington Regiment of the New Zealand Brigade in the lead, turned along the road to the north by El Shegeib and Iswaiwin

towards Bir Salem-Abu Irgeig, immediately to the south of the Wady Saba. The night passed without sight of the enemy. At 3 o'clock in the morning the Wellingtons reached El Shegeib; at 7 they were riding past Iswaiwin and, followed by Anzac Mounted Division, less the 2nd Brigade, advancing on Bir Salem-Abu Irgeig; meanwhile the Australian Mounted Division under Hodgson swung to the left towards Beersheba, and after marching a few miles halted and remained in reserve. Ryrie's brigade made Bir el Hamam soon after 7 a.m., and was then halted while patrols were pushed out towards the line Tel el Saba-Sakati. Beersheba was now clearly in view, and the horsemen appreciated the promised advantage of the high ground from which they looked down upon it. What they appreciated still more was the sight of a large pool of water in the wady near the town. While the Anzacs were at Asluj a thunderstorm had brought along heavy showers, and it was plain that the fall around Beersheba had been copious enough to be useful to the horses. Shortly before 8 o'clock the New Zealand Brigade was concentrated at Khashm Zanna, in touch with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade on its right, and soon afterwards the New Zealanders were in possession of Bir Salem-Abu Irgeig.

Two hours earlier, at 5.55, Chetwode had opened his bombardment on the enemy's advanced defences south-west of the town. Soon more than 100 field-pieces and howitzers were jolting the shallow advanced trenches with high explosive, and shrapnel was falling effectively on all moving targets and cutting off the positions from their rear. Twenty heavy guns were engaging the Austrian batteries. Unfortunately for the gunners, however, there was not a breath of wind, and all targets quickly became obscured by the smoke and dust of the bursting shells. Observation was for a time impossible, and the infantry commanders were left in doubt as to how far the enemy wire had been destroyed.

The roar of the guns, echoing and re-echoing in the hills, was highly stimulating to the horsemen on the right. The concern of the garrison was quickly evident. The quiet township started suddenly into activity, and troops and transport were rushed to the threatened points. At 8.30 the 181st Infantry Brigade of the 60th Division advanced and quickly

captured Hill 1070, a strong outpost, and British guns were rushed forward over the rough ground to bring them within range of the main Turkish line of defences. At 12.15 Chetwode launched his main attack with four brigades, and the infantry, advancing in beautiful order, speedily carried all their objectives between the Khalasa road and the Wady Saba. Soon afterwards troops of the 74th Division captured the last of the defences north of the wady. So dense had been the dust of the barrage, that in places little parties of the British had been able to creep forward, complete the cutting of the barbed-wire by hand, and so ensure a clear dash at the trenches. The work of the infantry had been brilliantly and completely successful, and the day was still young. All now depended on Chauvel.

The safety of Beersheba against attack from the east and south-east hinged mainly on a strong redoubt on Tel el Saba. The tel lies on the northern bank of the Wady Saba, three miles due east of the town, and is made up of a great mound with a cliff-face abutting on the rough wide water-course. A few acres in extent, it rises steeply to a height of a few hundred feet from the bare surrounding country. Its top is fairly flat, but is covered with boulders, which, with very little digging, gave sound cover to infantry, and provided perfect pockets for machine-guns. Two lines of trenches, one cut above the other in the cliff, commanded the plain across the wady to the south, and swept the floor of the waterway to the east. The steep sides of the mound were inaccessible to men on horses, and the naked plain held out unpromising prospects to a dismounted advance. Across the wady south of the town the Turks had barred the way with a chain of redoubts, and on the north up to Sakati their rear flank was safe in the rugged intricacies of the rising hills of Judæa. Chauvel was faced with the problem which was his unenviable portion in so many Palestine fights. He had a formidable objective, which demanded for its capture a heavy preliminary bombardment, followed by an attack by successive waves of infantry. At his disposal he had, scattered over many miles of front, only six brigades of horse, each capable of putting about 800 dismounted men into the firing-line, with one four-gun battery of horse artillery to each

brigade. On the strength of his brigades after Beersheba depended the grand advance of which this day's work was only the preliminary; and so, as in former fights, he dared not risk his horsemen in a precipitate assault.

As in all the fights of the light horse and New Zealanders, the enemy, if he was to be broken, must be broken by the exercise of superior wits, by resource, and by straight, effective shooting. Victory must be achieved not by heroic, forlorn-hope charges endangering and enfeebling Desert Mounted Corps at a critical time, but at the lowest possible cost. Such was the prospect as it appeared in the morning. But at Beersheba the usual tactics of the Anzacs, although exercised to the full, were found inadequate to overcome the opposition; and the light horsemen, appearing in a new rôle, threw caution and cunning to the winds, and snatched victory at the last moment in a blind, wild, headlong gallop.

Chauvel had hoisted his pennant on a commanding hill about four miles to the south-east of the town, while Chaytor had his headquarters at Goz el Shegeib. Both commanders had a complete view of the theatre of operations, and could see clearly most of the movements of their troops. By 9 a.m. the brigades were in readiness for the second phase of the advance, which aimed at seizing the Beersheba-Hebron road at Sakati and capturing Tel el Saba. At about that time mounted enemy troops were seen moving to reinforce the garrison at the Tel el Saba redoubt, and it was plain that the mound was strongly occupied; meanwhile enemy cavalry, guns, and transport were moving out of Beersheba by the Hebron road, either to escape capture or to guard against a raid on that line of communications. Ryrie at 9.30 having received orders to move with "all speed" on Sakati, the brigade trotted off from near Bir el Hamam, and headed north-west, Onslow with the 7th Light Horse Regiment setting the pace. The country was open and the going good. Onslow, always headstrong, had a mission greatly to his liking. Soon he had quickened the pace, and the horses, making light of their heavy loads and fighting for their heads, were rattling along at the gallop. Ryrie had scattered his brigade into artillery formation, and the precaution was quickly justified. As soon as the enemy



БЕЕРШЕВА

Авт. И. И. Мухомов. Официал Photo. № В-2371

10 June 1938



BRIGADIER-GENERAL L. C. WILSON, COMMANDER OF THE 3RD AUSTRALIAN
LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE, 1917-19 AND HIS STAFF

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B776

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perceived his mission, shrapnel fire was opened over the regiments; but, as usual with galloping troops in extended order, the artillery proved futile, and the Australians did not suffer a single casualty. The line of Onslow's advance lay across a large scattered Bedouin encampment, with its customary collection of fowls, sheep, donkeys, and camels. Through this excited, clamorous medley thundered the regiments, with shrapnel bursting thickly above them—and, while the light horsemen escaped loss, a number of the natives were hit.

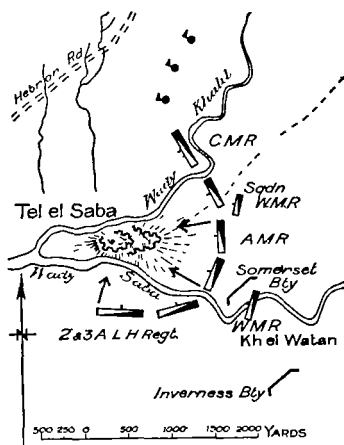
Onslow gained the Hebron road without slackening the pace, and his screen there rushed and captured a Turkish convoy of ten waggons with horses and mules. But on the heights immediately ahead was an enemy battery, some machine-guns, and riflemen. These had lost the range on the rapidly approaching horsemen, but they now fired point-blank into Onslow's squadrons, and only their excitement saved the Australians from heavy casualties. Fortunately the rough country gave immediate cover; into this the regiment was rushed, safe, but disappointed that, after winning to within a few chains of the guns, the hopelessness of the ground prevented their capture. About this time three of Onslow's men under Corporal E. B. Picton¹ very gallantly rushed and captured thirty-nine Turkish riflemen, who were overwhelmed by the daring of the Australians. Here in a wady near the road, under good cover but unable to move, the brigade stayed all day. Its immediate task was accomplished, but in that country a further advance was impossible.

Meanwhile Chaytor had sent the New Zealanders and the 1st Light Horse Brigade against Tel el Saba. At 10 o'clock the Somerset Battery opened fire on the position from near Bir Salem-Abu Irgeig at a range of 3,000 yards, to cover the advance of the New Zealanders to the north of the wady, while the 3rd Light Horse Regiment of Cox's brigade was ordered to attack the mound from the south-east. Approach up the bed of the wady was made impossible by enemy machine-gun fire; and Lieutenant-Colonel G. J. Bell,²

¹ Cpl. E. B. Picton, D.C.M., M.M. 7th L.H. Regt. Carrier; b. Narrabri, N.S.W., 23 July, 1893.

² Col. G. J. Bell, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 3rd L.H. Regt. 1917/18. Grazier; Member of Australian House of Representatives; of Yolla, Tas.; b. Sale, Vic., 29 Nov., 1872.

of the 3rd, after consultation with the commanding officer of the Aucklands, decided to move along open ground south of the water-course, with the Aucklands conforming on the north. A spirited gallop under fire carried Bell's regiment to within 1,500 yards of the enemy position before the men dismounted. The Inverness Battery covered the attack from a position near Khurbet el Watan, at a range of only 2,600 yards, and concentrated its fire upon a nest of machine-guns in caves some 400 yards east of Tel el Saba. But the fire of such light batteries against an enemy in earthworks is seldom destructive. The two batteries were handled with skill and marked fearlessness, and the Somerset guns were during the fight galloped up to within 1,200 yards of Tel el Saba; but the Anzac lines on either side of the wady were nevertheless subjected to punishment which, increasing in intensity as they advanced, soon threatened them with complete destruction. The Australians on the south were especially exposed, but the two advanced squadrons, led by Major A. Dick^a and Captain W. T. Tackaberry,^b crept gradually forward until they were able to bring effective Hotchkiss fire to bear upon the trenches on the face of Tel el Saba. A section of the machine-gun squadron under Lieutenant R. G. Garvie,^c working forward with the regiment also obtained good targets at close range.



The prospect that the 3rd Light Horse Regiment might cross the wady and scale the tel was not bright; but the fire and menace of the Australians were calculated to give full opportunity to the New Zealanders, who were now

^a Maj. A. Dick, D.S.O. 3rd L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Mount Templeton, S. Aust.; b. Yacka, S. Aust., 1 May, 1890.

^b Lieut.-Col. W. T. Tackaberry, 3rd L.H. Regt. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Malvern, Melb., Vic., b. Wexford, Ireland, 17 Sept., 1879.

^c Lieut. R. G. Garvie, M.C., 1st Aust. M.G. Sqn. Law clerk; of Crafer's District, S. Aust.; b. Aldgate, S. Aust., 4 July, 1895.

threatening the position not only from the east but across country which afforded more cover in the north. At 1 p.m. Cox ordered the 2nd Light Horse Regiment in from the south on the left of the 3rd, and they advanced at the gallop until they reached a zone of heavy fire, when their dismounting afforded a pretty example of light horse work at its best. So rapidly were the galloping horses checked, cleared, and rushed back by the horseholders, and so quickly did the dismounted men resume their advance on foot, that the Turks, under the impression that the regiment had retired on the horses, shelled the galloping animals, while for a time the riflemen were not fired upon. The Australians speedily cleared a group of huts in which riflemen had been concealed, and then pushed on towards the wady. The two advanced squadrons of the 3rd had by then gained the bank of the wide wady immediately opposite the Turkish position on the tel; the Wellington Regiment had been thrown in on the right of the Aucklands, and the enemy was now under intense converging fire. Every Turk who showed was an easy target, and the position of the garrison had become precarious. At 3 o'clock the New Zealanders rose from the line to which they had crawled, and dashed up the slopes with the bayonet. Simultaneously Dick's squadron of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment advanced across the wady. The resolute Aucklands, who throughout the day had displayed fine cunning and boldness alternately, were the first to reach the trenches. As they scrambled up the mound, 132 Turks tamely surrendered, while the rest fled towards Beersheba and the north-west. Four machine-guns were captured on the position. Troops of the 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Regiments at once gave chase and, taking up a position where the Wady Saba joins a wady from the north, caused many casualties among the running foe. At about the same time an enemy force moved out from the town and threatened a counter-attack, but was speedily driven off by the Australians.

By 3 o'clock Chaytor was in possession of Tel el Saba; with Ryrie's brigade on the Hebron road at Sakati, the Anzacs had completed the second phase of their advance. But the enemy resistance at Tel el Saba had been stiffer than Chauvel expected. Earlier in the afternoon, he had detached the

3rd Light Horse Brigade and two batteries of artillery from the Australian Mounted Division, and sent them round on the right of the New Zealanders to assist in the attack on the redoubt. The appearance of the regiments, trotting in mounted, doubtless contributed to the collapse of the garrison, but the movement also weakened the Australian reserves.

At 3.30 orders were issued for the final phase of the struggle, the occupation of Beersheba. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was to strike for a line between the Hills 970 and 1020 north of the town, while Cox's 1st Brigade, moving on the left of the 3rd, was to take as its objective a line from the mosque in the town to Hill 970, both inclusive. But the position was now grave. The enemy, although driven off Tel el Saba, was strong south of the town, and still stronger in the hills immediately north of it. The country ahead of the 1st and 3rd Brigades was rough and difficult, and progress must be slow. There remained only a few hours of daylight. Chetwode's infantry divisions could not be moved on the town because of the absence of water-supplies, and because a further advance would disorganise the next stage in the operations, when they were to march north-west on Sheria and Hareira.

The moment had come for the employment of the Australian Mounted Division and the 7th Mounted Brigade, which, astride the Khalasa-Beersheba road, had filled the gap between Chetwode's infantry and Desert Mounted Corps. In none of his fights was Chauvel ever in a hurry to commit his reserves. "If there was one lesson more than another I had learned at Magdhaba and Rafa," he remarked some time afterwards, "it was patience, and not to expect things to happen too quickly. At Beersheba, although progress was slow, there was never that deadly pause which is so disconcerting to a commander." His plan was to hold up Hodgson's Australian Mounted Division until the Anzacs had carried Tel el Saba, and then to launch it in a main assault on the town. As the hours passed, he had reluctantly ordered Wilson's 3rd Light Horse Brigade round to Chaytor's assistance; but he resisted any temptation he might have felt to fling more of Hodgson's force into what was only the preliminary phase of the struggle.

Immediately Tel el Saba fell, however, and as the 1st and 3rd Light Horse Brigades became available to strike at the town from the east, Chauvel gave decisive orders to Hodgson. At that time (about 3 o'clock) Hodgson, together with Grant of the 4th Light Horse Brigade and FitzGerald of the 5th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade, was at Chauvel's headquarters. Had Tel el Saba fallen earlier, as had been anticipated, a dismounted attack would doubtless have been decided upon. But with the day on the wane, it was now neck or nothing. There was a brief but tense discussion, in which FitzGerald and Grant pleaded for the honour of the galloping attack which was clearly in Chauvel's mind. FitzGerald's yeomanry had their swords and were close behind Chauvel's headquarters; Grant's Australians had only their rifles and bayonets, but they were nearer Beersheba. After a moment's thought, Chauvel gave the lead to the light horsemen. "Put Grant straight at it," was his terse command to Hodgson; and Grant, swinging on to his horse, galloped away to prepare and assemble his regiments. Chauvel throughout the campaign scrupulously guarded against showing a preference to his Australians over the British yeomanry. "If I did ever favour the light horse," he said afterwards, "it was at Beersheba, when, in giving the lead to Grant, I was perhaps influenced by a desire to give a chance to the 4th and 12th Regiments, which up to then had seen very little serious fighting."

While Chauvel was thus engaged in flinging Hodgson's men into the fight, an exchange of telegrams took place between Allenby's headquarters and the Australian leader, about which there has been much controversy and misunderstanding. In all serious actions, no matter how resolute and promising, provision must be made against the possibility of failure. If Beersheba was won, the horses of Chauvel's two divisions were to be watered at the wells in the town and the pools about the Wady Saba. But early in the afternoon, as Tel el Saba continued to resist, Chauvel was asked from General Headquarters if he could water in the Wady Malah, in the event of the supplies at Beersheba not becoming available. At that time he had no thought of failure; but, replying literally to the inquiry, he said: "Water situation in

Wady Malah is not hopeful, and if Commander-in-Chief approves, it is proposed to send back all troops which have not watered to Bir Arara and Wady el Imshash, if Beersheba is not in our possession by nightfall." When this telegram reached General Headquarters, Allenby was away with Chetwode at El Buggar, and it was at once repeated to him. Allenby had no knowledge of the original message of inquiry which Chauvel was answering, and naturally interpreted the statement as implying a contemplated withdrawal. His response was characteristic of his hot-tempered, impulsive nature. "The Chief orders you," Chauvel was advised, "to capture Beersheba to-day, in order to secure water and take prisoners." This peremptory message afterwards became known to the whole army; and it was generally believed, outside Desert Mounted Corps, that Allenby's intervention was directly responsible for the great light horse charge which gave the British victory.

But before Allenby's telegram reached Chauvel Grant's regiments had their orders for mounted action, and were making ready for the charge. The 11th Regiment was spread over a line of outposts extending towards the 7th Mounted Brigade, but the 4th and 12th were immediately available. These two regiments, the 4th (Victorian) under Lieutenant-Colonel M. W. J. Bouchier,⁶ and the 12th (New South Wales) under Lieutenant-Colonel D. Cameron, were in the Iswaiwin area, four miles from Beersheba. On their arrival there in the early morning the horses had been off-saddled, and both men and horses fed. They had spent a quiet day in rest and, when they received orders to saddle, were fresh and eager for action. Aircraft activity, which has brought so many changes into warfare, prevents the close assembly of waiting cavalry in readiness for the charge. At 3 o'clock Grant's regiments, as a precaution against bombing, were waiting scattered over a wide area in single troops; it was therefore nearly 4.30 before Bouchier and Cameron drew up their men behind a ridge about a mile north of Hill 1280.

From the crest of the ridge Beersheba was in full view, four miles away to the north-west. The course of the Aus-

⁶ Brigadier Hon. Sir Murray Bouchier, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 4th L.H. Regt., 1917/19, and 4th L.H. Bde. for short periods, 1917/19. Grazier; of Strathmerton, Vic.; b. Potulla, Vic., 4 Apr., 1881. Died, 16 Dec., 1937.

tralian lay down a long, slight slope broken occasionally by tracks cut by heavy rains, but bare of growth or other cover. Somewhere between them and the town lay a system of enemy trenches. Grant knew from photographs taken from the air, and shown to him by Chauvel when he received his orders, that these trenches were protected by neither barbed wire nor pits; but they were cleverly masked, and could not be definitely located. The Victorians were on the right, the 12th Regiment on the left. This was a pure cavalry adventure, but the regiments bore neither sword nor lance, and, in order to give the charge as much moral effect as possible, the men rode with their bayonets in their hands.

Each regiment formed up on a squadron frontage in three lines from 300 to 500 yards apart. More than a year earlier the light horsemen had made a mounted dash across the salt-pan at Katia; but that was a slight rear-guard action, on which no great issue depended. What was coming was something very different. Long before the mounted troops had reached Beersheba, every troop leader and most of the men had gained, despite all the secrecy observed, a sound grasp of the main feature of Allenby's great scheme. They knew that the whole Gaza-Beersheba line was to be broken; they knew Beersheba must be captured on this first day. From the hilltops they had watched the slow progress of the attack by Anzac Mounted Division; and they realised that only a wild, desperate throw could seize the prize before darkness closed in and gave safety to the enemy. Already the horses were casting long shadows as troop after troop moved into position, and the light, although still clear, had that uncertain quality which marks the failing day. Every man therefore was restless, excited, and resolute for victory; and Grant, as he took his final look at his men, must have felt that, if strong, fast horses urged on by great-hearted men, ably led and completely careless of their lives, could achieve the purpose, it would surely be achieved.

At 4.30 the two regiments moved off at the trot, deploying at once until there was a space of five yards between the horsemen. Surprise and speed were their one chance, and almost at once the pace was quickened to a gallop. As the force topped the crest, Grant with McKenzie, his brigade-

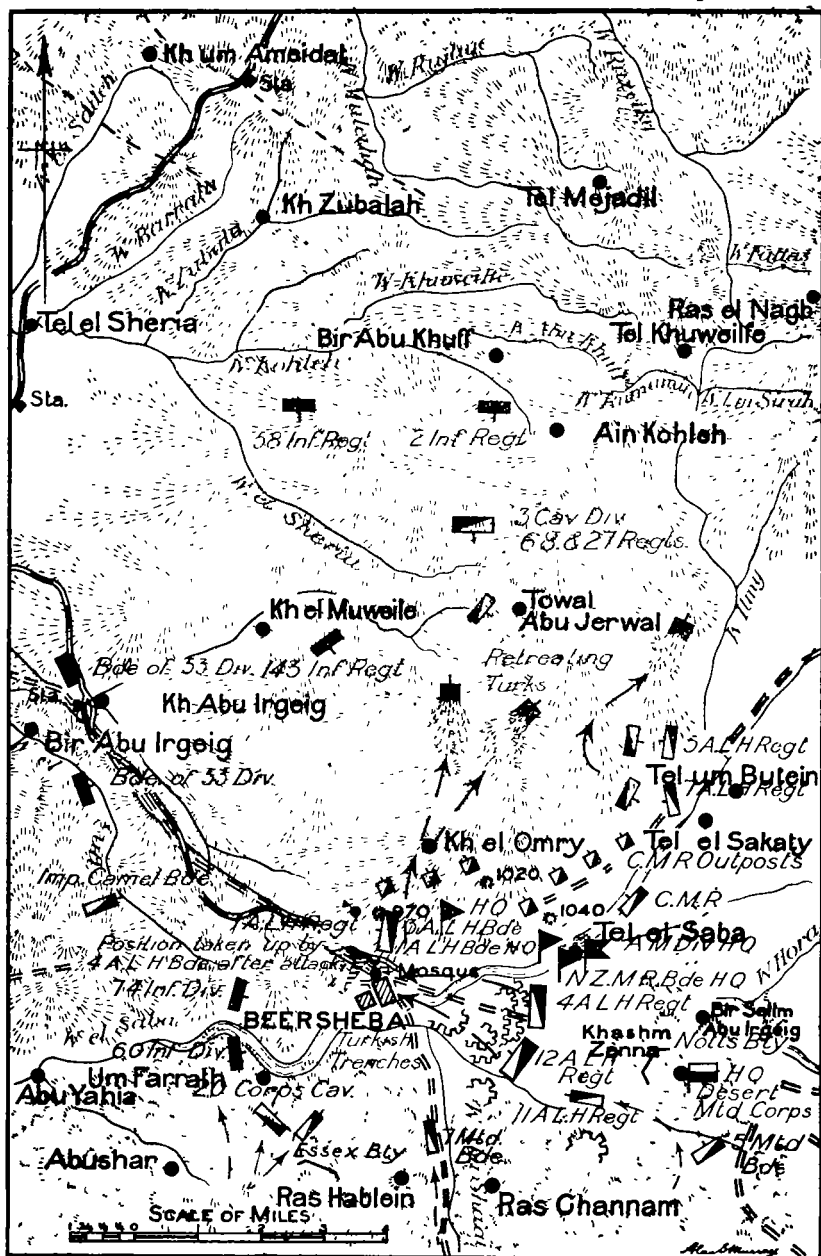
major, rode in the lead, and Bouchier and Cameron were at the head of their regiments; but when once direction was given to the movement, the leading squadrons of each regiment pressed forward, and Grant fell back into the reserve line, from which he could control subsequent developments. Cameron and Bouchier were never far behind the vanguard. The leading squadron of the 4th on the right was under Major J. Lawson,⁷ a powerful young Yorkshireman, who had emigrated to Victoria some years before the war; the vanguard of the 12th was entrusted to Major E. M. Hyman,⁸ a farmer from New South Wales. Regimental headquarters and the machine-guns rode with the reserve squadron. The 11th Regiment followed at the trot, and then came FitzGerald's 5th Mounted Brigade, while away on the left the 7th Mounted Brigade advanced briskly along the Khalasa road. If, therefore, the heroic galloping vanguard was a slender striking force, it had a substantial following in close support.

The Turks were quick to observe the movement, and opened fire with shrapnel on the 4th and 12th Regiments immediately they deployed. But the range was long, the target scattered and fleeting, and the casualties trifling. After going nearly two miles, hot machine-gun fire was directed against the leading squadrons from the direction of Hill 1180 on the left. This fire, coming from an effective range, might have proved destructive; but the vigilant officers of the Essex Battery detected the machine-guns as soon as they began to shoot, got the range at once, and were lucky enough to put them out of action with the first few shells.

Lawson and Hyman were now within range of the Turkish riflemen directly in their track, and these, after an erratic opening, settled down to sustained rapid fire. Many horses in the leading line were hit and dropped, but there was no check to the charge. The enemy fire served only to speed the gallop. These Australian countrymen had never in all their riding at home ridden a race like this; and all ranks, from the heroic ground scouts galloping in front of the squadron leaders, to the men in the third line, drove in their spurs and

⁷ Col. J. Lawson, D.S.O., V.D. Second-in-command, 4th L.H. Regt., 1918. Hotelkeeper; of Rupanyup, Vic.; b. Halifax, Yorks, Eng., 16 Feb., 1884.

⁸ Maj. E. M. Hyman, D.S.O. 12th L.H. Regt. Farmer and grazier; b. Tamworth, N.S.W., 13 July, 1885.



BEERSHEBA—CHARGE BY 4TH A.L.H. BRIGADE—POSITION AT DUSK, 31ST OCTOBER, 1917.

charged on Beersheba. Grant, when he gave his order, had no clear knowledge of what was ahead, and neither Lawson nor Hyman yet knew. But all rode for victory and for Australia.

The fire from the trenches came chiefly from Lawson's front, and the bold Yorkshireman led his squadron straight at it. As they came within half-a-mile of the earthworks, which were now clearly in view, the casualties among the horsemen almost entirely ceased, despite an increase in the firing. Over the last few hundred yards Lawson's men galloped untouched; the Turks, surprised and bewildered at the sheer audacity of the charge, had failed to change the sights on their rifles, and their fire was passing harmlessly overhead.

The first trench, a shallow, unfinished one, held by only a few riflemen, was taken by the rushing horsemen in their stride. Close behind them was the main line, a trench in places ten feet deep and four feet wide, thickly lined by Turks. As Lawson's men galloped at this obstacle several horses and men were shot, but the excited line pressed on, jumped the trench and, reining up amidst a nest of tents and dugouts, dismounted. Lawson's three leading troops were then joined by a troop from the 12th Regiment; as the horses were led at the gallop to cover, the Australians leaped into the main trench which they had just crossed and went to work with the bayonet, at the same time clearing up the enemy in the dugouts. Lieutenant F. J. Burton⁹ was killed as his horse was jumping the trenches, and Lieutenant B. P. G. Meredith¹⁰ fell immediately after dismounting. But the Turks were now so demoralised that they offered only a feeble resistance to the bayonet, and any shooting on their part was wild and comparatively harmless. After between thirty and forty had been killed with the steel, the rest threw down their rifles and begged for pity. One of the troopers had galloped on to a reserve trench further ahead. The Turks shot his horse as he jumped, and the animal fell into the trench. When the dazed Australian found his feet he was surrounded by five Turks with their hands up. The enemy had been beaten

⁹ Lieut. F. J. Burton 4th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Minyip, Vic.; b. Nullan, Vic., 22 Dec., 1893. Killed in action, 31 Oct., 1917.

¹⁰ Lieut. B. P. G. Meredith, 4th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Larpent, Colac, Vic.; b. Keilambete, Terang, Vic., 9 July, 1882. Killed in action, 31 Oct., 1917.

rather by the sheer recklessness of the charge than by the very limited fighting powers of this handful of Australians. Captain A. D. Reid,¹¹ who was leading the squadron of the 4th which followed Lawson, dismounted one of his troops to deal with the enemy in the shallow advanced trench, and then pressed on to Lawson's assistance. In a few minutes the fight there was over.

The progress of the 12th was equally brilliant and decisive. The Turkish defences were not continuous. Major Hyman, at the head of the leading squadron, charged up to the trenches of a small redoubt and at once dismounted with about a dozen of his men. But most of his command passed the redoubt close on their right, and, finding they had ridden through a gap in the defensive lines, galloped straight on for Beersheba, with Captain R. K. Robey¹² at their head. Hyman with his party engaged the Turks in the trenches with rifle and bayonet; a bitter little fight ensued, and not until the Australians had killed sixty of them—many of whom were shot by Hyman with his revolver—did the enemy surrender. As the trenches were approached, the second squadron under Major C. M. Fetherstonhaugh,¹³ a South African veteran and a fine old soldier, had reduced the distance between the first and second lines. Fetherstonhaugh's horse was wounded within thirty yards of the trench. With his first thought for a favourite charger, Fetherstonhaugh put the animal out of its pain with a shot from his revolver, rushed on into the trench, emptied his weapon into the nearest Turks, and then fell, shot through both legs. Most of his squadron, however, swung away round the redoubt and, led by Captain J. R. C. Davies,¹⁴ followed Robey's men at the gallop towards the town. Robey rode hard for the western side of Beersheba, aiming to envelop it by the north, while Davies led his men along the main street.

As the light horsemen galloped on, they realised how

¹¹ Maj. A. D. Reid, M.C. 4th L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Murrumburrah, N.S.W., 25 July, 1886.

¹² Capt. R. K. Robey, M.C. 12th L.H. Regt. Estate manager, of Ulmarra, Clarence River, N.S.W.; b. Tamworth, N.S.W., 26 July, 1891.

¹³ Lieut.-Col. C. M. Fetherstonhaugh, D.S.O. 12th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Coonamble, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 10 Feb., 1879.

¹⁴ Lieut.-Col. J. R. C. Davies, M.C., V.D. 12th L.H. Regt. Grazier, b. Puen Buen, Scone, N.S.W., 25 July, 1882.

dramatic in its suddenness and decisiveness had been their wild rush through the enemy line. When the attack of Grant's brigade was launched, the Turks had been crushed by Chetwode's infantry on the south-west and had lost Tel el Saba on the east. But the British infantry, having reached its appointed objectives, had stopped according to orders. The garrison was still able to offer a stout resistance to Anzac Mounted Division and the 3rd Light Horse Brigade on the east; if their redoubts to the south and south-east survived, they still had hopes of holding on until darkness fell, when the High Command might be able to send them reinforcements—at worst, they could make an orderly withdrawal after destroying their supplies and the precious wells. But the wild charge of the two light horse regiments had in a few minutes destroyed this expectation, and the Turks were quick to appreciate the significance of the blow. The way was now clear for the advance of the 7th Mounted Brigade, which was approaching along the Khalasa road, and the opposition to the 1st and 3rd Light Horse Brigades was at the same time taken in rear. Between the time when the advanced Australian squadrons smashed into the trenches and the arrival of Robey and Davies on the outskirts of the town, the Turkish force, hitherto in a state of comparative order, had been thrown into chaos. From staff officers to men in the ranks, the one thought was of escape and personal safety. There was a wild mob-rush towards the hills north and north-west. Guns were limbered up and moved off as fast as their miserable horses and slow oxen could draw them. Most of the engineers, who had demolition charges laid ready at the wells and important buildings, bolted with the crowd, leaving their work undone.

About half-a-mile before the galloping Australians had reached the town they began to overtake fugitive troops and guns. Nine guns were overrun, and most of the gunners surrendered on being challenged; others, who fought, were shot or bayoneted by the light horsemen from their horses. The pursuit continued through Beersheba and out on to the hills, until the Australians were checked by fire from enemy riflemen and machine-gunners in position. For some time after the town was galloped, scattered enemy parties continued

to set fire to buildings and to blow up railway points, but soon after nightfall all the prisoners had been collected. General Grant with his staff arrived at about 11 p.m.; a systematic search was made for the wells, and the horses, many of which had been for thirty hours without a drink, were relieved as fast as water could be raised. For hours the wires along the whole front repeated the news of the fall of the town; and the tidings were the more welcome because the whole army realised how close Allenby had been to an initial failure which might have baulked his whole grand operation.

From the time when the 4th and 12th Regiments received orders to saddle to that of the entry into Beersheba, less than an hour had passed. It had been a glorious hour, filled not only with military achievement of a very rare kind, but with memorable deeds by individual officers and men, which serve vividly to demonstrate the spirit which alone made success possible. Lawson's two ground scouts, Trooper T. O'Leary¹⁵ and Trooper A. E. Healey,¹⁶ galloped some seventy or eighty yards in advance of the squadron, but both rode through untouched. O'Leary jumped all the trenches and charged alone right on into Beersheba. An hour and a half afterwards he was found by one of the officers of the regiment in a side street, seated on a gun which he had galloped down, with six Turkish gunners and drivers holding his horse by turn. He explained that, after taking the gun, he had made the Turks drive it down the side street, so that it should not be claimed as a trophy by any other regiment. Healey, his mate, dismounted on reaching the trenches, and was the first man among the Turks with the bayonet. While the fighting was proceeding at the trenches, Armourer Staff-Sergeant A. J. Cox¹⁷ saw a machine-gun being hurriedly dismounted from a mule by its crew. In a minute it would have been in action at close range. He dashed at the party alone, bluffed them into surrender, and took forty prisoners. Trooper S. Bolton¹⁸

¹⁵ Pte. T. O'Leary, M.M. 4th Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Station hand; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 1883.

¹⁶ Warrant-Officer A. E. Healey, M.M. 4th L.H. Regt. Carpenter; of Malvern, Melb., Vic.; b. Newmarket, Melb., 4 Aug., 1884.

¹⁷ Warrant-Officer A. J. Cox, D.C.M. 4th L.H. Regt. Assayer; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Hazelhurst, Hampshire, Eng., 7 Sept., 1880.

¹⁸ Pte. S. Bolton, D.C.M. 4th L.H. Regt. Engine-driver; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Kilrea, Londonderry, Ireland, 1 May, 1894.

single-handed chased a gun drawn by six horses, which, with three Turks on the horses and three on the limber, was being galloped out of action by a German officer. Bolton had lost his rifle, but had picked up a revolver. As the German refused to halt, Bolton fired at him at close range, but the weapon missed fire. The Australian then knocked the German out of the saddle with the butt-end of the revolver, and forced the Turks to return with the gun. Trooper W. Scott¹⁹ had his thigh broken by shrapnel in the charge to the trenches, but refused to fall out, insisting that if he could not fight he could lead horses back. He led out at the gallop five dismounted horses, and fainted as he was lifted from the saddle.

One of the leading sections of Lawson's squadron followed Lieutenant Burton as they raced at the trenches. The four troopers and Burton were old Gallipoli men; all were shot dead as they flung themselves from their horses within a few feet of the enemy. The mounted stretcher-bearers rode forward, as they always did, with the advanced light horse lines, and worked coolly in the midst of the dismounted fight round the earthworks. While so engaged Private A. Cotter, the famous Sydney fast bowler, was shot dead by a Turk at close range. As has been recorded already, he had at the second Gaza engagement been singled out for fine work under heavy fire; he behaved in action as a man without fear.

The two regiments took prisoners to the number of thirty-eight officers and 700 other ranks, and captured nine field-guns, three machine-guns, a large number of transport vehicles, and much other material. A German officer among the prisoners said that the Turkish commander and his staff had fled about ten minutes before the Australians entered the town. The light horse casualties in the charge were astonishingly light. The 4th Regiment had two officers and nine other ranks killed and four officers and thirteen other ranks wounded; the 12th had twenty other ranks killed and four officers and fifteen other ranks wounded. Nearly all the casualties occurred at the trenches.

Chauvel's position, as from his headquarters he watched the day's fighting develop, had not been enviable. During

¹⁹ Pte. W. Scott, M.M. 4th L.H. Regt. Labourer; b. Melbourne, Vic., 1887.

the hour which followed his order to Grant, he was viewing a picture rarely seen by a corps commander in modern warfare. The New Zealanders were still swarming about Tel el Saba; on their right the 9th and 10th Regiments, widely and deeply scattered, were trotting forward under white puffs of the enemy's shrapnel. On either side of the Wady Saba glimpses of the dismounted lines of the 1st Brigade were caught, as the men pressed steadily forward with their rifles. Behind this advance the faithful little Royal Horse batteries were flinging out their shells, or, gun following gun at the trot and canter, were hurtling over the rough ground into positions nearer the enemy. Slow-moving ambulances and racing gallopers, and here and there a cloud of rushing horses, added to the animation; significantly waiting in every little pocket over the rolling country were dark masses of led horses, quivering under the noise of battle and all the excitement of the fateful hour. With all this seeming life, however, progress was, as Chauvel well knew, dangerously slow. The advance lacked the strength in men and arms which alone could carry it forward to victory before the close of the day. But then appeared the 4th Brigade. Over the skyline of their sheltering ridge came the ground scouts of the two regiments, and next Grant and Cameron and Bourchier, followed by the leading squadrons. Those who looked on held their breath as the squadrons deployed to right and left, and trotted, every horse pulling his rider almost out of the saddle, down the slope. Squadron followed squadron; then, as they all rode into view, came the enemy shrapnel. That was the signal to gallop. Away went the ground scouts in a bee-line for the mosque shining white in the setting sun; away after them went the eager squadrons. For a minute perhaps the three galloping lines could be seen by those who watched them; then they were swallowed up in their own dust and the gathering twilight. Not for half-an-hour did Chauvel learn that Beersheba had at the eleventh hour been so decisively won. This has sometimes been referred to as the critical fight of Chauvel's career. But the Australian leader has confessed that he was far more anxious during the morning of the Turks' attack at Romani than while waiting for Grant's throw at Beersheba.

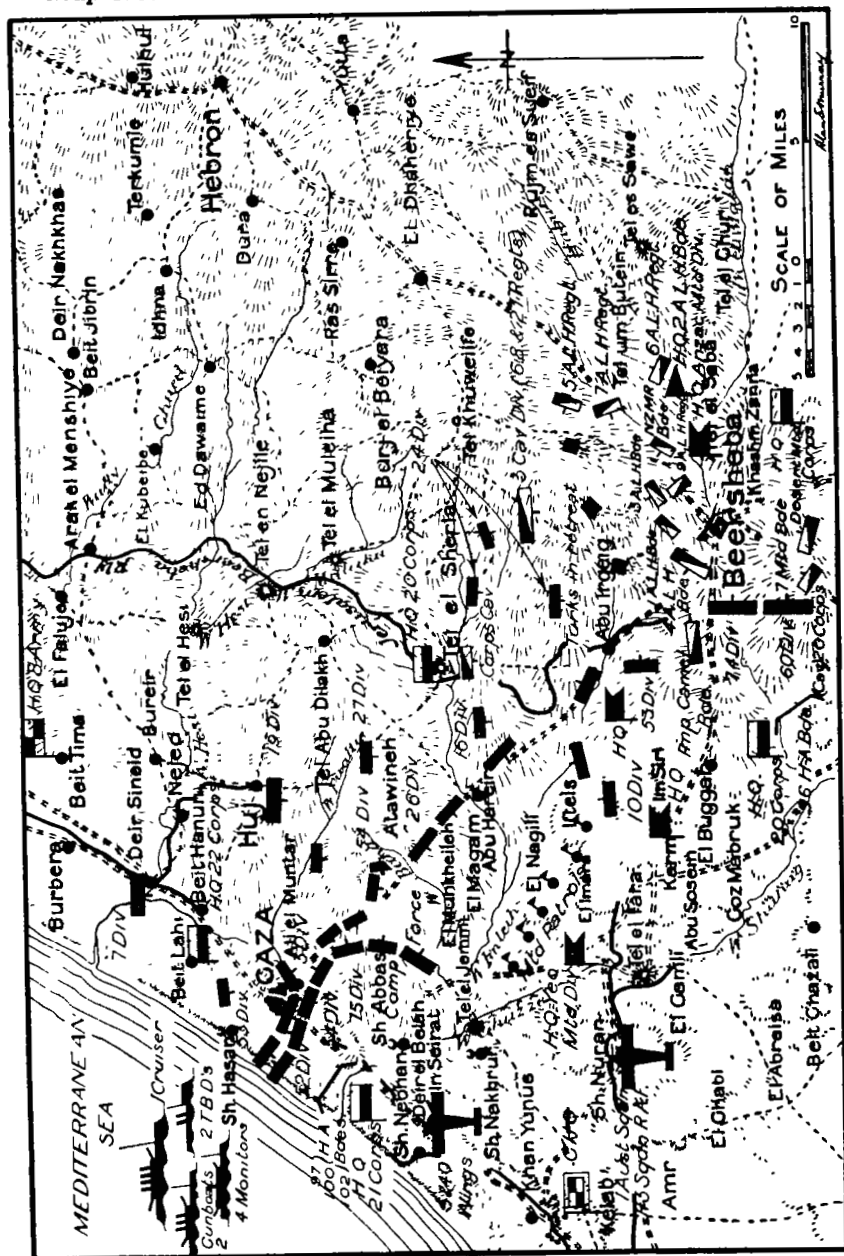
The fine exploit of the 4th and 12th Regiments, although it occupied less than an hour, and although only 400 or 500 light horsemen actually made touch with the enemy, had a far-reaching effect on the whole campaign. Nothing but a "forlorn-hope" charge could have captured Beersheba that evening, and all Allenby's plan rested on the fall of the town on the first day of the battle. That had been the emphatic point in all the British leader's orders, and he expressed it again in his peremptory message to Chauvel in the middle of the afternoon. Without the success of the Australian horsemen, the whole story of the next month would probably have been different, and the vast and careful preparations of the summer months might easily have ended in another stalemate engagement. With Beersheba in his hands as planned, with the wells available for the horses and men of Desert Mounted Corps, and with the infantry free to swing on to Sheria and Hareira, Allenby's scheme was working precisely to plan. But the charge of the 4th Brigade had results which went even further. This dazzling success of galloping horsemen against the enemy in entrenchments was of vital significance to an army commander who had at his disposal a great force of three mounted divisions. It was a shining precedent to every divisional, brigade, and regimental leader.

Before Beersheba all, or nearly all, the British cavalry leaders had a deep respect for the Turks in position. Here and there an officer—and fortunately Cameron of the 12th Light Horse Regiment was one of these—believed that, given good ground and plenty of pace, the Turks could be safely galloped in any minor position. Cameron had seen Boers in sangars successfully rushed by mounted riflemen in the South African War, and had frequently urged his belief upon Grant. But, with occasional exceptions, the cavalry leaders were inclined to accept the view established by the struggle in France, that trench warfare and machine-guns had, for the time at least, greatly curtailed the possibilities of cavalry shock-tactics. The Beersheba charge was for days almost the sole topic of conversation in the camps and messes of Allenby's army, and the general verdict was that Grant's adventure was something more than a desperate expedient; and everywhere, and especially among the yeomanry, there

was a resolution to lose no opportunity of following the example of the 4th Brigade. The charge had demonstrated again the incalculable effect of shock-tactics. The swift, thundering rush of successive waves of horsemen over the dusty ground in the failing light had bewildered and deceived the Turkish infantry, who had, as they afterwards confessed, believed them to be at least a division strong. The British yeomen were armed with swords, and so, unlike the light horsemen, were complete cavalry. Barrow, always a headstrong cavalryman, saw in the success of this charge the refutation of all the new pessimism as to the employment of the sword. His capable brigadiers were in full agreement with him; and in the advance up the maritime plain, during the month which came after Beersheba, they followed, to the everlasting glory of the yeomanry, the lead so convincingly set by Grant in the critical hours of October 31st. Moreover, while the famous ride cheered the British horsemen, it had a depressing and a permanent effect on the nerves of the Turks. An intercepted wireless message, sent by the Turkish commander as he fled in the night from Beersheba, was that his troops had broken because they were "terrified of the Australian cavalry."

A German staff officer captured in Beersheba said that, when the 4th Brigade was seen to move, its advance had been taken for a mere demonstration. "We did not believe," he said, "that the charge would be pushed home. That seemed an impossible intention. I have heard a great deal of the fighting quality of Australian soldiers. They are not soldiers at all; they are madmen." From then to the end of the war the Turks never forgot Beersheba; their cavalry, always shy of the light horsemen, from that hour practically faded out of the war, so afraid were they of a blow from these reckless men who had ridden their big horses over strongly armed entrenchments; and the enemy infantry, when galloped, as after Beersheba they frequently were, invariably shot wildly and surrendered early in the conflict. The charge had dealt a heavy wound to the enemy morale, from the High Command down to the men in the ranks.

The attack of the 1st and 3rd Light Horse Brigades from the east had been vigorously pressed. The 1st Regiment under Granville had during the fight for Tel el Saba been in



GAZA—ALLENBY'S ATTACK—POSITION AT ABOUT 6 P.M., 31ST OCTOBER, 1917.

reserve, watching Cox's left flank, and was fresh for the subsequent advance. As the regiment moved dismounted on the line from the mosque to Hill 970, it was at first vigorously shelled. But as it approached the town in the dusk, opposition suddenly failed—a consequence of the lightning stroke of the 4th and 12th Regiments—and Granville's men, then moving rapidly, joined up with the 4th Brigade without further opposition. They took about ninety prisoners, who were glad to surrender. Already Beersheba had the appearance of a deserted town; the native population had fled some hours earlier, and when the Turks had been rounded up the Australians were alone in the moonlit streets. The Turks, however, continued to hold a line in the hills close to the town, and light horsemen who moved within the illuminated zone of burning buildings were at once worried by snipers. Grant established his outposts, and the night passed quietly.

During the afternoon, as has been observed, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Wilson (less the 8th Regiment) had been detached from the Australian Mounted Division and moved round on the right to assist, if necessary, in the capture of Tel el Saba. The 8th under Maygar remained on a line about 1,500 yards east of the Ras Ghannam redoubt, and had the 7th Yeomanry Brigade on its left. As he marched round to the right of the New Zealanders, Wilson with the 9th and 10th Regiments was freely shelled with shrapnel, but no casualties were suffered. At 5 p.m. the regiments received the order to advance on the line between the two Hills 1040-960, and moved off smartly on their horses. As the 9th Regiment cleared Tel el Saba on its right, an enemy aeroplane swooped down and dropped bombs from a height of about 800 feet. The aim of the German pilot was sure, and both the 9th and the machine-gun squadron suffered severely, Captain H. Williams²⁰ and Lieutenants F. J. Linacre and A. N. McL. Brown²¹ being wounded, and thirteen other ranks killed and seventeen wounded, while thirty-two horses were killed and twenty-six wounded. Swinging round, the same airman then inflicted losses on the New Zealanders. The 9th and 10th

²⁰ Capt. H. Williams, 9th L.H. Regt. Auctioneer; b. Jamestown, S. Aust., 7 Apr., 1884.

²¹ Lieut. A. N. McL. Brown, 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Motor mechanic; b. Hurstville, Sydney, N.S.W., 27 Nov., 1893.

Regiments met with little or no opposition in their advance, as Grant's men were now in Beersheba.

All day the German airmen were bold and effective in their bombing. Both Chauvel's and Chaytor's headquarters were severely punished, and also came under a good deal of shell-fire. At 2.30 p.m. two enemy machines flew very low over the 8th Light Horse Regiment. The Victorians had just received orders to report to Chauvel's headquarters, and were in close formation, and the Germans, using both bombs and machine-guns, quickly caused many casualties. Lieutenant-Colonel Maygar, V.C., and his grey horse were both severely hit by a bomb, and the animal bolted into the darkness. The regiment never saw again their loved and gallant leader. Many troopers dashed off in pursuit, but, when the horse was found covered in blood, Maygar was missing. He was picked up during the night by other troops, and taken with all possible speed to hospital. But his wound, and the subsequent loss of blood before he received assistance, proving fatal, he died on the following day at Karm. Maygar's death was deeply lamented not only by his fighting regiment, but by the whole light horse and New Zealand forces. The fearlessness and devotion which had won him the Victoria Cross in South Africa had been followed by fine work upon Gallipoli; and at Bir el Abd, and in the bloody day of April 19th, he had in every crisis stirred the spirit of his regiment by his example in the firing line. He was a true fighting commander.

During the night all available engineer parties of the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions were sent into Beersheba to seek out the wells and develop the flow. But, although the town contained many wells, the supply was far short of Desert Mounted Corps necessities. Thorough as were the Commander-in-Chief's preparations, the great flank movement might still have failed, had it not been for the thunderstorms of October 25th, which left useful pools of water over a wide area about Beersheba. These pools, although rapidly evaporating, watered the horses of a number of brigades on October 31st and the days which followed. Without them all the mounted troops must have been drawn to Beersheba after the first day's fighting, and there for a

day or two the water would not have been able to support more than one or two brigades. Thus at the outset was Allenby favoured by fortune.

The only incident which disturbed the night after the capture of Beersheba was a brush which the 10th Light Horse Regiment had to the north of the town with a party of Turks, who had apparently lost direction in the dark. A squadron of the Western Australians under Major Timperley had taken up an isolated outpost on a small hill. At 9 o'clock Turks were heard approaching on three sides; when challenged, they halted, and began to dig in. The Australian machine-guns at once swept their lines, and the enemy fled, leaving fifty dead behind. Early on the morning of November 1st two German pilots again bombed and machine-gunned the 8th Light Horse Regiment. This time, however, the troops were dismounted, and one of the airmen was hit by rifle-fire and crashed in the hills to the west.

CHAPTER XXIV

TEL EL KHUWEILFE

THE successful blow at Beersheba had effects upon the enemy even beyond Allenby's anticipations. The Turkish intelligence had made light of the flank attack, even while it was developing, and had reported "six British infantry divisions deeply echeloned" before Gaza in the closing days of October. After Beersheba the failure to sense Allenby's scheme became still more marked. On the night of October 31st von Kressenstein jumped to the conclusion that Allenby intended to strike for Jerusalem up the Hebron road along the saddle of Judæa; he immediately swung three divisions of infantry from the Gaza side to the east. In committing this disastrous error he was influenced by the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade's seizure of the road at Sakati, but still more by the activities of Colonel Newcombe's Arab detachment. Newcombe, marching from Asluj some time before Desert Mounted Corps, had made a wide détour by the east, established his headquarters at Yutta, and taken up a position on high ground overlooking the road between Dhaheriye and Hebron. His force was small, and carried only three days' rations, but was stiffened by a few British machine and Lewis gunners, and was well supplied with ammunition. His mission was merely to harass the Turks retiring from Beersheba; as the road was already cut further south, at Sakati, he remained for a time in idleness, except for the capture of some motor-transport. The Turks, ignorant of the character and strength of the party, apparently took it for a strong advance-guard of Chauvel's mounted troops, and marched a force of no less than six battalions against it, three from Hebron and three from Sheria. Newcombe's men, surrounded by overwhelming numbers, resisted bravely as long as their ammunition lasted, but were reduced by severe losses, and finally made prisoners two or three days after the fall of Beersheba.

While this minor struggle was taking place, Ryrie's brigade had worked its way up the road to Dhaheriye, probing the

enemy position on high ground to the west of the road. At the same time two regiments of the 7th Mounted (Yeomanry) Brigade (with the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment attached) and the Camel Brigade had moved on what proved a very hazardous enterprise against the strong Turkish reserve flank position at Tel el Khuweilfe. All this movement, which was, in truth, little more than reconnaissance, contributed to the enemy's deception. Throughout the day of November 1st, when the last touches were being given to the preparations of Bulfin's XXI Corps for its great stroke against the enemy's extreme right flank between Gaza and the sea, Turkish troops were being hurried away from behind Gaza to meet the imagined menace on the east.

Allenby had intended that Desert Mounted Corps and XX Corps should strike north-west two days after the capture of Beersheba. Chetwode was to assail Sheria and Hareira, while Chauvel, covering his right flank, was to win Nejile and the abundant water-supplies in that district. But the problem of supplies on the flank, and especially of water, proved even more difficult than was expected. Chauvel and Chetwode were on November 1st strongly of opinion that to embark upon the next phase of the struggle immediately, as planned, would be taking excessive risks. The blow could not yet be given its full force, and scarcity of water might bring the whole movement to a premature standstill. The Commander-in-Chief chafed at the proposed delay, but bowed to the opinion of his two experienced lieutenants, and the advance was postponed for four days. Perhaps the strongest ground for an immediate renewal of the battle was the necessity for compelling the Turks to remove their deep reserves from the Gaza sector, and so ease in some measure the tremendous task which lay before Bulfin's divisions in their frontal attack against the enemy trenches on the sand-dunes. Happily von Kressenstein's miscalculation as to the British objective on the flank was already achieving that much-desired development.

Bulfin attacked in the dark at 3 a.m. on November 2nd. Nothing could have demonstrated more strongly than this assault the change which less than six months had wrought in the strength and quality of the British army. Between the

beach and the impenetrable cactus hedges which guarded the face of the town on the south, the enemy had laboriously established a system of trenches about 4,000 yards long, which any leader might have deemed impregnable. With one flank protected by the sea, and the other by the cactus and the high ground around Gaza, the line ran an erratic course over the dunes; its trenches were soundly upheld by sandbags, and the trunks of thousands of palm-trees and the beams of most of the houses in Gaza had contributed to their timbering. The defences were deep, line succeeding line. Barbed-wire, so sparingly used on the Beersheba flank, was applied here in profusion; the soft sand made a cushion for British shells, and only occasional direct hits gave concern to the defenders.

The British line lay a thousand yards away, and the No-Man's Land to be crossed in the assault was loose sand, on which marching with packs was heavy and very slow; the surface was in part undulating, but many wide patches were quite level, and on them the infantry must be fully exposed to the Turkish fire. This made a daylight attack impracticable.

The contemplated assault imposed on Bulfin's troops a task which would have been quite beyond the same divisions a few months earlier. But, as this engagement was to demonstrate, the transformation in individual fighting men and in battalions and brigades, so miraculously wrought in the preceding six months, was only one phase of the difference between Allenby's army and Murray's. Allenby's command was complete in all arms. No infantry, however stalwart and brilliant, could have carried the line between Gaza and the sea without the support of a great artillery barrage; and this Allenby could provide.

The initial bombardment opened on October 27th, with the dual purpose of reducing the defences and of concealing the attack on Beersheba. It was continued at intervals, and with increasing intensity, by two 60-pounder batteries, five and a half 6-inch howitzer batteries, one 8-inch howitzer battery, and the divisional artillery of the 52nd, 54th, and 75th Divisions. Two days later the navy joined in the shelling, and day and night the Turks were punished with artillery as they had never been in this or any other war. Many of the guns

were directed on the enemy's batteries, and, before the infantry attacked, compelled a number of these to pull back their guns. The first essay of Bulfin's infantry was made by the 7th Scottish Rifles against a formidable position known as "Umbrella Hill." Attacking at 11 p.m. on November 1st, after an intensive bombardment, the Scots fought in a fashion which must have been very assuring to the Corps commander. As the first wave, about sixty-five strong, approached the enemy wire, they were entirely destroyed by the explosion of four large contact mines. But the second wave, undismayed, went straight through. In half-an-hour the Turks had been bombed and bayoneted into silence, and the hill won.

At 3 o'clock on the morning of the 2nd, No-Man's Land was crossed from end to end by the 161st and 162nd Brigades of the 54th Division, and the front-line trench was completely captured. Very bitter fighting attended the capture of the supports, in which six tanks successfully co-operated; but the British pushed on, until they had seized Sheikh Hassan, a little settlement which serves Gaza as a port on the open roadstead. Heavy counter-attacks were decisively repulsed, and the British, after a dash of 3,000 yards on a 5,000-yard front, consolidated their new position. The enemy had been severely mauled; 1,000 Turkish dead were buried on the ground, and 650 prisoners, 3 guns, 29 machine-guns, and 7 trench mortars were captured. Nor was the fight a bloodless one for the British, who had 30 officers and 330 other ranks killed, 94 officers and 1,870 other ranks wounded, and 10 officers and 360 other ranks missing. The flank was not yet decisively turned; but the enemy had been jolted from a line which he believed invincible, and, although less than two miles had been gained by the British, that two-mile stretch—lying where it did, as a flanking protection to Gaza—was of vital importance. Within three days Allenby had, by a surprise attack, shattered the enemy at Beersheba, which the Turks had not thought could be approached by a powerful force; he had, by a plain, deliberate frontal attack crushed him on the sand-dunes at the other extremity of the line; and the enemy, confused as to where the next heavy blow would fall, was already in a state of dangerous vacillation and disorganisation.

On the morning of November 1st the 53rd Infantry Divi-

sion, with the Camel Brigade on its right, advanced to Towal Abu Jerwal, to be in a position to cover the XX Corps when Chetwode moved against the Kauwukah and Rushdi trench systems, which protected Sheria and Hareira. The move placed the 53rd with the Camels in the foot-hills about eight miles north of Beersheba, and about the same distance west of the Hebron-Beersheba road. Already the water shortage on the right flank was becoming acute; two brigades of Anzac Mounted Division were ordered to push north, between the Camels and the Hebron road, in search of wells. At the same time the 2nd Light Horse Brigade on the east of the road moved from the Sakati area towards Dhaheriye. The New Zealanders and part of the 1st Light Horse Brigade had intermittent fighting against small bodies of Turkish cavalry, but pushed on steadily through the hills to a position between Bir el Makhrune and Towal Abu Jerwal. During the day 180 prisoners and four machine-guns were taken by the Anzacs; but the main purpose of the advance, which was to discover water, was disappointed. A number of wells were located, but the water was at extreme depths and in very limited supply.

There was now abundant evidence of the movement of enemy troops to the east—large bodies were moving towards a strong natural position in the hills around Tel el Khuweilfe, where good water was known to exist. To forestall the enemy at Khuweilfe, and if possible to seize and develop the water there, the 7th Mounted Brigade, with the 8th Light Horse Regiment attached, was sent forward to occupy the area Tel el Khuweilfe-Bir Abu Khuff-Ain Kohleh.

By nightfall on November 1st Chauvel was compelled to confess to grave anxiety about water. Great numbers of the horses had received a short allowance at Asluj, and since reaching the Beersheba district on the morning of the 31st many were still without a drink. He obtained Allenby's reluctant permission to send the Australian Mounted Division back to Karm on the following day, a move which not only served to illustrate again how narrow was the margin of

victory at Beersheba, but was also an important factor in the argument for delaying the next phase of the operations. The country was even more destitute of foodstuffs than of water. The bare plains and harsh stony hills had already become dusty again after the thunderstorms, and offered not a blade of grass to supplement the small ration of a few pounds of pure grain which was now the sole issue to the already jaded horses. The month of October, just before the early rains, has ever been the season of reduced wells and short supplies, not only on the plains of southern Palestine, but over the maritime plain and throughout Judæa. Not without justification had the Turks believed that Beersheba was made safe by its desert environment, and that, even if their line should be broken, the British would find vigorous pursuit impossible over the country immediately behind.

The advance of the 7th Mounted Brigade and the 8th Light Horse Regiment towards Khuweilfe proved the forerunner of some very stiff and bloody fighting in that district. Having lost Beersheba, the Turks, pivoting on their strongholds at Sheria and Hareira, withdrew their left and rested it on Khuweilfe, which gave them a stout flank merging into the stronghold of the Judæan hills. The British aim was to deny them Khuweilfe, or, if that proved impossible, to drive them from the position. On the night of the 31st the 8th Light Horse under Major A. McG. McLaurin¹ had rejoined the 3rd Brigade, and bivouacked to the east of Tel el Saba. Early on the morning of November 2nd the regiment was ordered to join the 8th Mounted Brigade, under Brigadier-General J. T. Wigan,² on the Hebron road two miles north of Beersheba. Wigan at the time had only two of his own regiments, the Sherwood Rangers and the South Notts Hussars, and recognised, as he moved towards Khuweilfe, that he had a heavy task before him. Owing to some confusion in orders, McLaurin understood that he was to be away from the 3rd Brigade for only one day; the regiment was rushed forward without drawing

¹ Lieut.-Col. A. McG. McLaurin. Commanded 8th L.H. Regt., 1917/18. Vigneron, of Rutherglen, Vic; b. Deniliquin, N.S.W., 21 Aug., 1867. Died of illness, 23 Nov., 1918.

² Brig.-Gen. J. T. Wigan, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. Officer of British Regular Army, of Danbury, Chelmsford, Eng.; b. West Hartlepool, Eng., 31 July, 1877.

rations, and, as the country was too rough for wheels, the regimental water-cart was also left behind. As Wigan led his little column past Abu Jerwal, he learned from the 2nd Light Horse Regiment that the enemy was building up a stout line between Ain Kohleh and the Hebron road.

Tel Khuweilfe is a dominating, bare, flat-topped hill flanked by rough ranges on either side, but open to the south up a wide valley. It commanded the country to the west; if held by the enemy, therefore, it would be a menace to the right flank of the British infantry and mounted troops as they struck for Hareira and Nejile, but its capture by the British would leave the enemy's left flank completely open. Wigan advanced directly up the valley until he came within about three miles of the tel; then, meeting with opposition, he sent the Sherwoods forward along the hills on the right and the South Notts over the high ground on the left. The Sherwoods met with little resistance, and made good progress, but the South Notts regiment found the enemy strongly posted about Ain Kohleh, and was definitely checked. By 2 o'clock Wigan was convinced that nothing but a bold thrust up the valley offered any prospect of success. Major Shannon, of the 8th Light Horse, therefore advanced at the gallop with his squadron directly against the tel; but, finding the fire too hot on the exposed plain, he swung into the foot-hills to the left. There he travelled rapidly over the ranges until he reached a position about 800 yards from the Khuweilfe hill, where he was joined by the rest of the regiment. Considerable enemy strength was then displayed; as the yeomanry regiments on either side had been unable to conform with the Australian advance, McLaurin dismounted his squadrons, and worked up a defensive line. After nightfall Wigan endeavoured to link up the yeomanry with the light horse. The South Notts made contact on the left, but the Sherwoods could not get forward. McLaurin was then, with his right exposed, close to a strongly held, dominating enemy position; he therefore established a small post in the valley on his open flank, and waited anxiously for the dawn. The line held by the three regiments at this time extended from a point half-a-mile to the west of Ain Kohleh through Hill 1580 to Hill 1910 (El Jabry).

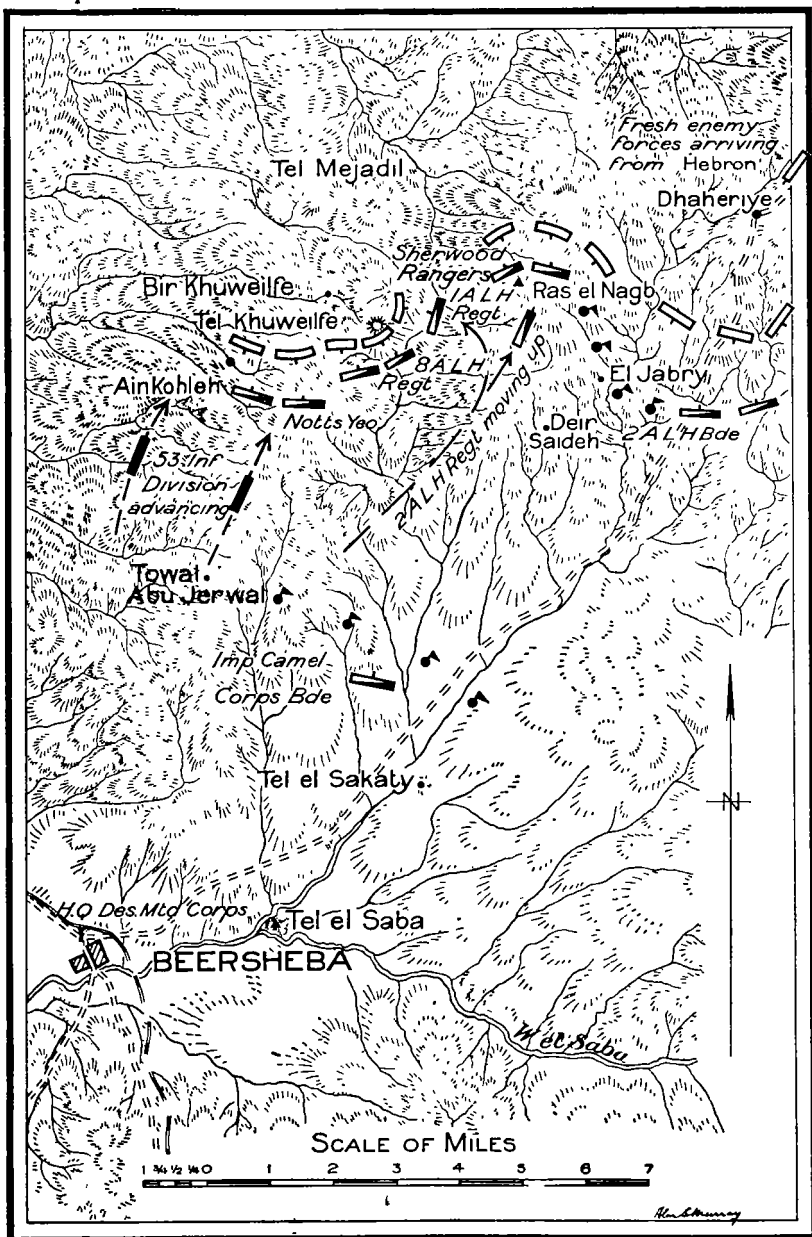
All night the 8th Light Horse Regiment was under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, but, secure in their rocks, the men suffered very few casualties. At dawn it was discovered that the enemy had been substantially reinforced, and that he had in places advanced his firing line to within 200 or 300 yards of the Australians, who had now been twenty-four hours without food, while their water-bottles had been exhausted early on the previous day. During the night of the 2nd, the 53rd Infantry Division and the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade were ordered forward to ensure, as it was hoped, the speedy reduction of the opposition. The 53rd Division was to advance on the line Ain Kohleh-Abu Khuff on the left, and Cox's brigade on the line Bir Khuweilfe-Ras el Nagb on the right. At 7 a.m. the Sherwood Rangers had seized Ras el Nagb, a considerable hill in rough country to the north-east of Tel Khuweilfe. Cox pushed forward the 1st Light Horse Regiment with four machine-guns, allotting as its objective a rough ridge immediately east of Tel Khuweilfe. Every move served to disclose the strength of the enemy. Granville's men, after dismounting from their horses, advanced rapidly on foot, and covered 800 yards of rough fire-swept ground. This thrust carried them considerably beyond the troops on their flanks; but the squadron leaders, believing they would be supported, pushed on until they reached a patch of sheltered ground on the eastern side of the ridge, within 300 or 400 yards of the Turkish left flank. There they spent the day, completely isolated, and with the ground behind them dominated by Turkish fire. Their cover was scanty, and every man who moved at once became a target for the vigilant enemy snipers. Under such conditions heavy casualties among officers are inevitable. Lieutenants W. J. M. Edwards,³ F. A. Guthrie,⁴ and J. R. Wright,⁵ and thirteen other ranks were killed; and Major

³ Lieut. W. J. M. Edwards. Adjutant 1st L.H. Regt., 1917. Station manager, b. Waverley, Sydney, N.S.W., 25 June, 1891. Killed in action, 3 Nov., 1917.

⁴ Lieut. F. A. Guthrie, 1st L.H. Regt. Station overseer, of Neutral Bay, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Burwood, Sydney, 13 Sept., 1893. Killed in action, 3 Nov., 1917.

⁵ Lieut. J. R. Wright, 1st L.H. Regt. Miner; of Mudgee, N.S.W.; b. Buckaroo, N.S.W., 17 June, 1887. Killed in action, 3 Nov., 1917.

Map No. 17



KHUWEILFE, 2ND-3RD NOVEMBER, 1917.

A. A. White,⁶ Captain M. E. Wright,⁷ and Lieutenants W. H. Gray,⁸ W. F. M. Ross,⁹ and O. N. Hayes,¹⁰ and thirty-nine other ranks were wounded. Major White's squadron had all its officers killed or wounded, and was at the close of the day commanded by a sergeant.

As a rule the Turks scrupulously observed Red Cross rules; but on this day all enemy arms fired very deliberately upon three ambulances and carts which had been sent up over the exposed ground for the wounded. The carts were clearly marked with the Red Cross, the visibility was good, and the Turks were shooting at close range. In one cart most of the wounded and drivers were hit, and four horses killed. A Turkish doctor, taken prisoner soon afterwards, was reminded of this gross offence; he said he had been at Khuweilfe, and explained that the ambulance had been fired on at the urging of a German officer, who argued that the carts were probably carrying ammunition up to the Australians. At that time the position of the light horsemen was critical, and the German insisted that they should be given no possible chance of escape. During the campaign there were other cases of what appeared to be deliberate firing on the Red Cross in action; and it was remarkable that in nearly every instance the offenders were not clean-fighting Turkish riflemen, but Austrian artillerymen or German machine-gunners.

Soon after the advance of the 1st Regiment, Cox took over Ras el Nagb from the yeomanry, and the 8th Light Horse Regiment passed under his command. The yeomanry were withdrawn, but the Victorians were ordered to hang on to their precarious position at all costs. The day was hot, and they were now suffering much distress from want of water; but the order was obeyed with fine spirit, and their fire-fight was vigorously maintained until their ammunition was exhausted. At 11 o'clock in the morning a counter-attack by two com-

⁶ Lieut.-Col A. A. White, M.C., V.D. 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier, of Scone, N.S.W., b. Waverley, Sydney, N.S.W., 25 Aug., 1888.

⁷ Capt. M. E. Wright, M.C. Adjutant 1st L.H. Regt., 1917/19 Grazier, of Murrumbidgee District, N.S.W.; b. Blandford, N.S.W., 7 March, 1893.

⁸ Lieut. W. H. Gray, 1st L.H. Regt. Agent; of Tomingley West, N.S.W.; b. Victoria, 1890.

⁹ Lieut. W. F. M. Ross, 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier, of Harden, N.S.W.; b. Darlington Point, Sydney, N.S.W., 23 Feb., 1888.

¹⁰ Lieut. O. N. Hayes, 1st L.H. Regt. Wool classer; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 11 Feb., 1890.

panies of enemy infantry developed against Ras el Nagb, but Cox at once sent one squadron of the 3rd Regiment to reinforce the men of the 2nd, and the Turks were easily dispersed. Further British regiments were now arriving, and before 1 o'clock the 5th Mounted Brigade had taken over Ras el Nagb from the Australians. With the 53rd Division marching up from the south-west, the light horsemen were ordered to stand upon their ground; this they did without trouble until 4 o'clock, when the infantrymen on the left and the 5th Mounted Brigade on their right took over their line. At nightfall the yeomanry line ran from the right of the 53rd Division through Ras el Nagb to El Jabry, where touch was made with patrols of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. The day's fighting had revealed considerable and increasing enemy strength, and it was clear that only careful preparation and persistent and heavy fighting would clear the Turks from the position. Lack of water was still a formidable obstacle, and the absence of supplies nearer than Beersheba prevented Chauvel from concentrating strength on the position. Each brigade, after a day on the ground, had to be withdrawn eleven miles to water, and the fighting and marching and loss of sleep were rapidly reducing the strength of the troops.

To the men of the 8th, who had been for some hours without munitions and thirty hours without water, the relief was particularly welcome. McLaurin marched at once for Beersheba, which he reached at 10 o'clock at night. The horses, which had been thirty-nine hours without water, crowded madly about the troughs at the wells, almost beyond the control of their exhausted riders. During two days and a night, in which they had been constantly fighting or riding, the Victorians had existed on one bottle of water and practically no rations. Many men drank to excess at the wells, and the result was a severe outbreak of diarrhoea.

While the fighting was proceeding at Khuweilfe, Ryrie's brigade was vainly endeavouring to bear in from the east across the Hebron road on the extreme flank. The opposing enemy force was small; but the country was extremely rough, and the Turks, securely posted on the higher ground, had all the best of the struggle. Shortly after daylight on the 1st, the 5th Light Horse Regiment, advancing up the Hebron road

towards Bir el Makhrune and Deir Saideh, was stopped by mountain guns and machine-guns shooting from unassailable heights. On the morning of the 2nd the full brigade tested the same route, but was held up by the Turks near Deir Saideh. The enemy guns could be plainly seen, and the Ayrshire Battery effectively shelled them into silence; but advance along the road was still impossible. Ryrie then decided to leave the 6th Light Horse Regiment to contain the enemy there, while he led the 5th and 7th on a détour by the east to menace the enemy's flank and rear near Dhaheriye. The country covered by the two regiments was broken and steep, and marching was slow. Night came down before any attack could be made. Casualties were slight, as the range was extreme and cover good; but Captain A. C. Thompson,¹¹ of the 6th, was killed near Deir Saideh.

On the 3rd the turning movement by Ryrie's brigade was again attempted. But the enemy had brought reinforcements down from Hebron, some of them in motor-lorries; he had only a few guns, but these, well placed, and directed by aeroplane observation, swept the valleys occupied by the Australians' led horses; lack of water was a constant embarrassment to Ryrie, whose horses were fortunate if they had one drink a day after travelling long distances; ammunition and supplies were short, and reached the brigade only after heavy journeys over the hills at night. In fact, Ryrie's brigade was being worked to exhaustion in the mere effort to hold its ground. At 10 a.m. on the 3rd Chauvel advised Ryrie that the brigade's purpose would be achieved if the line then held could be maintained; the object was to dominate the road and guard the flank, rather than to advance. During the 4th and 5th the brigade continued to demonstrate; the light guns of the Ayrshire Battery fought on persistently, but were unable to check the enemy artillery. The natives of the district appeared friendly to the Australians; but the manner in which the enemy artillery discovered and re-discovered the horses of the brigade, as they were shifted from shelter, suggested strongly that the Arabs were serving the Turks. Meanwhile

¹¹ Capt. A. C. Thompson, 6th L.H. Regt. D.A.A. & Q.M.G. Aust. Mtd. Div., 1917. Drill instructor, Aust. Permanent Forces; of Tarcutta, N.S.W.; b. Queanbeyan, N.S.W., 5 May, 1886. Killed in action, 2 Nov., 1917.

the rain-pools dried rapidly, and on the 6th the brigade, after a very arduous week, marched back to Beersheba.

Meanwhile the 1st Light Horse Brigade, after fighting at Khuweilfe, reached the wells at Beersheba at 3 a.m. on the 4th, when the horses had been thirty hours without water. The New Zealand Brigade had been under orders to relieve the 5th Mounted Brigade on the Ras el Nagb line early on the 4th; but, owing to water difficulties, Meldrum was unable to leave his bivouac north of Beersheba until 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Even then his horses had received very little water since leaving Beersheba on the previous day, and went into the line already thirsty. At about 4.30 a force of some 2,000 Turks with five guns attacked the yeomanry on Ras el Nagb; but the British, aided by the rough ground, maintained their position until about dark, when they were relieved by the Canterbury Mounted Rifles. The Aucklands and Wellingtons arrived an hour afterwards. The Camel Brigade, which had advanced on the right flank of the 53rd Division, was (with the exception of the 3rd Battalion) placed for the day under the orders of the Anzac Mounted Division. The 3rd Battalion remained under the command of the 53rd Division.

The mounted brigades (including the Camel Brigade) on the Ras el Nagb sector at Khuweilfe were now under orders to hold the line, while the 53rd Division made a decisive assault from the south-west. The British infantry brigades, after their arrival on the afternoon of the 3rd, had been securely held up by the enemy. Every advance had been shattered and heavy casualties suffered; and the Turks not only were still strong, but were steadily being reinforced. The check was disappointing to the British High Command, but it continued to serve one good purpose—the flow of troops from the Gaza district towards the eastern flank was each hour improving Allenby's prospects. Chetwode was completing preparations for his great blow against Sheria and Hareira. and Bulfin was ready to strike on either side of Gaza.

After a quiet night, the New Zealanders were heavily shelled at about 8 a.m. on the 5th. Two hours' bombardment followed, and the Turks then advanced against the left of the Canterburys. Two squadrons of the Wellingtons were rushed

up in support, and, after a persistent effort in which his losses were heavy, the enemy was stopped, and the opposing forces remained quiet for the rest of the day.

Chetwode's attack on the Kauwukah defences (which were held by the Seventh Turkish Army) was timed for dawn on the 6th. The blow was to be struck with the 10th, 60th, and 74th Divisions, while General Barrow, of the Yeomanry Mounted Division, was to cover the right flank with a force made up of the 53rd Division, the Camel Brigade, the Yeomanry Mounted Division, the New Zealand Brigade, and part of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. Chauvel was to be in readiness, in the event of Chetwode's success, to advance with the remaining forces of Desert Mounted Corps towards the line Jemameh-Huj. The original order to strike for Nejile was cancelled. On the evening of the 5th the Camel Brigade took over the Ras el Nagb line in order to allow the New Zealanders to return to Beersheba to water. The 2nd Light Horse Brigade withdrew from its position along the Hebron road on the same night; but it left a few patrols in observation, and one squadron of the 7th Regiment (commanded by Major Easterbrook) was sent as escort to eight machine-guns under Captain J. R. Cain, which proceeded to the support of the Camels. The 53rd Division was ordered to capture Tel Khuweilfe on the 6th, simultaneously with the advance of the three infantry divisions against the Kauwukah system.

From first to last the Khuweilfe operations went in favour of the defenders. At the outset the British had made a false estimate of its strength; and, although reinforcements had been brought up to aid the attack, the enemy had maintained the balance in his favour by constant additions. The assault was therefore of an accidental and piecemeal character, and lacked the preparation, the resolution, and the individual leadership essential for success. The advance of the 53rd Division on the morning of the 6th was to be made in the dark, a precarious undertaking over mountainous country. At 4.20, after a vigorous bombardment of the enemy positions on Tel Khuweilfe and the adjacent hills, the 158th Brigade was to advance, maintaining a front of 1,500 yards, and assail the Turks with the bayonet. The

1/1st Herefords was on the right, the 1/6th Royal Welsh Fusiliers on the centre, and the 1/7th Royal Welsh Fusiliers on the left. The 3rd Battalion (Australian) of the Camel Brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel de Lancey Forth, was to follow in rear of the right of the 1/1st Herefords; when the Herefords had gained Tel Khuweilfe, the Australians were to occupy the hill and cover the flank of the brigade in the subsequent advance. Unfortunately one of the infantry battalions was late in reaching the point of assembly, and the others were compelled to start without it. This caused a gap in the line, and the Herefords on the right were ordered to extend their frontage to the left. Attempting this movement, the battalion lost direction, and performed a complete left wheel. De Lancey Forth kept to his line of march as ordered, and just before dawn found his battalion isolated, with Tel Khuweilfe immediately ahead; the barrage had ceased, and any demoralisation it may have caused among the Turks was past.

In the first light of the dawn de Lancey Forth recognised that, as soon as his men were discovered, they would come under a murderous fire at close range from the tel; he therefore moved to the cover of a low spur which ran parallel with it. As his men cleared the open ground, it was swept with enemy machine-gun fire, but the Turks were just too late. Two companies made a line behind the spur, and at once came under heavy machine-gun fire, while the remaining two companies were placed in support behind another spur 300 yards away. The commanding tel was only 300 yards from the British front line, and the Turks endeavoured to envelop the right of the Camels, but were checked. At the same time about 200 men of the 1/1st Herefords, who had been under very heavy punishment and had lost all their officers, fell back in confusion on the left of the Camel line, abandoning to the enemy an extension of the ridge held by the Australians, which dominated the Camel line. Lieutenant E. W. Dixon,¹² recognising instantly that, unless the Herefords held their part of the ridge, the Camel battalion must at once retire, rushed with about thirty of his men to meet the retreating

¹² Capt E. W. Dixon, D S O. 15th L H Regt. Gazier; of Cowes, Phillip Island, Vic.; b. St. Kilda, Melb, Vic., 18 Dec., 1879.

infantry. Waving his hat, he led them under heavy fire back on to the ridge, and the British, responding to the gallant example, held to it steadfastly. Later in the day the Turks made a determined effort to envelop the left rear of the position. In places they broke the Hereford resistance, and endeavoured to seize a dominating hill behind the Australian position—which at this time was almost encircled by the enemy's fire and threatened with complete isolation—but the British infantry rallied finely, the enveloping movement was checked, and disaster averted.

Nevertheless the enemy by this time was sweeping with shrapnel, machine-gun, and rifle fire every approach to de Lancey Forth's men. "At about 10 o'clock," to quote from the official narrative of the 3rd Camel Battalion, "representations were made by the 3rd Battalion to the General Officer Commanding the 158th Brigade for the infantry to come up and drive the Turks off the ridge which they held to the left rear, and over which the infantry held the commanding ground. This, for reasons unknown, they were not ordered to do; but the 2nd Light Horse Brigade Machine-Gun Squadron were ordered to gallop up a little valley commanded by the Turks and secure the left of the ridge they held. They charged in a very gallant manner, and at once came under a murderous machine-gun and shrapnel fire; but, very gallantly led by Captain Cain, they reached their objective, at which point the hill rose so abruptly as to give cover from the Turkish firing line above and slightly to their right. They rushed their guns up the hill within forty yards of the Turks, and, although the teams were shot down almost to a man, their very gallant action caused the Turks to pause and gave the 3rd Battalion breathing-time to size up their position."

The order which committed Cain and his men to their heroic enterprise was perhaps a mistake. The machine-gunners paid dearly. Lieutenant A. S. Muir¹³ and seven men were killed, and Captain Cain, Lieutenant R. B. Dixon,¹⁴ and Lieutenant R. G. Owen-Jones¹⁵ and sixteen men were

¹³ Lieut. A. S. Muir, 2nd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. School teacher; of Esk, Q'land; b. Merinda, Q'land, 27 Nov., 1892. Killed in action, 6 Nov., 1917.

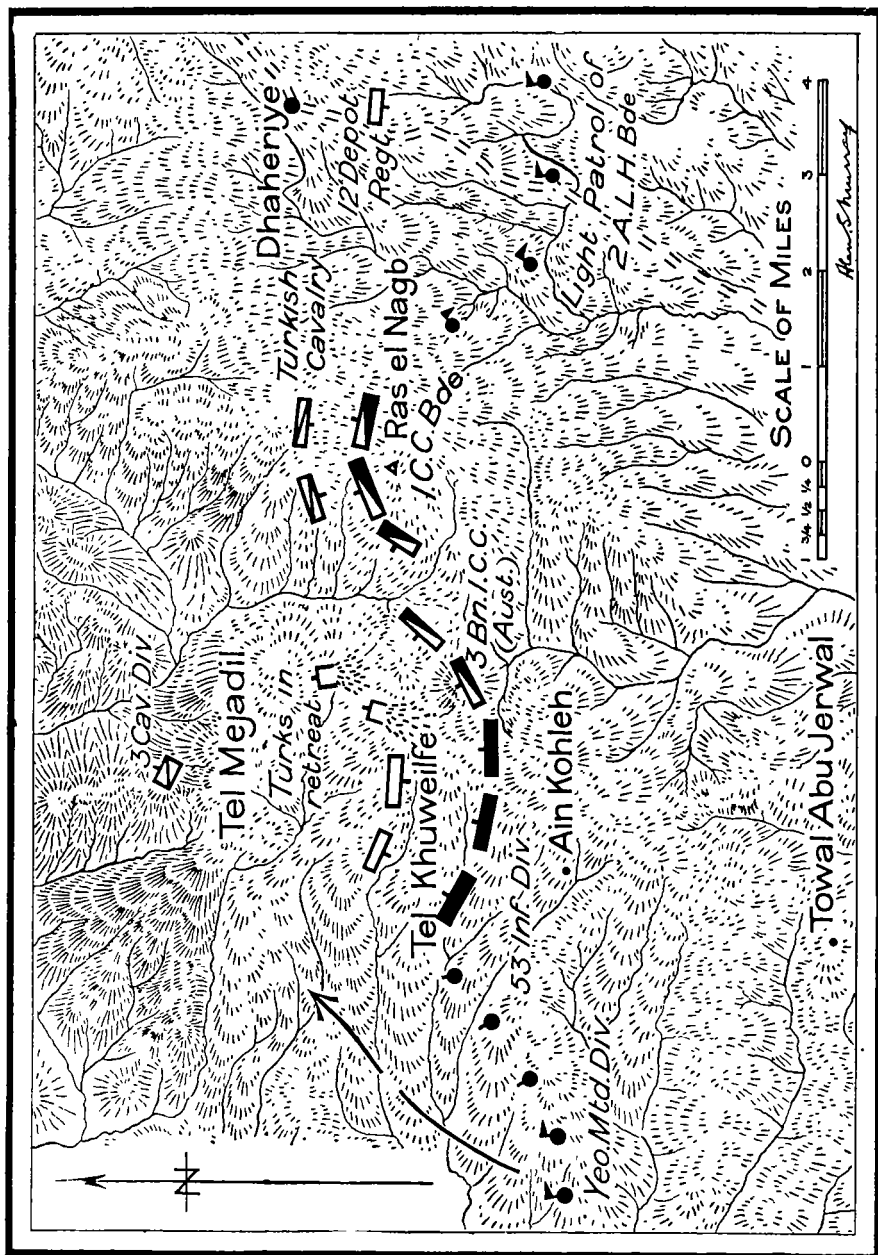
¹⁴ Capt. R. B. Dixon, 2nd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Farmer; of Tamworth, N.S.W.; b. Quirindi, N.S.W., 28 Nov., 1887.

¹⁵ Lieut. R. G. Owen-Jones, 2nd Aust., M.G. Sqdn. Dairy farmer; b. Innisfail, Q'land, 16 Apr., 1892.

wounded. But there is compensation in the thought of the splendid dash and daring with which the mounted machine-gunners raced their teams forward to almost certain destruction under a hail of fire, and in the magnificent fashion in which they served their guns within forty yards of the Turkish line. In every engagement in the long campaign this spirit distinguished the light horse machine-gun squadrons. In fight after fight their support alone made the advance of the sparse lines of riflemen possible; wherever the adventurous light horseman went, he knew that galloping close at hand were the heavily burdened pack-horses of the gunners, ready to come into action a few moments after a halt was ordered.

All day Cain's men maintained their precarious position, and by their fire had a material effect in checking the Turkish counter-attacks, which constantly threatened to sweep the 3rd Camel Battalion and the British infantry off their ground. The Turks that day fought with exceptional resolution and savagery, and British and Australian wounded and stretcher-bearers were repeatedly fired upon. De Lancey Forth's men held on under severe punishment all day and through the night. Shortly before dawn the machine-gun party was withdrawn. All day on the 7th the fire-fight between the rival forces was very heavy, and at the close range the sniping was especially deadly; but about 3 o'clock the 3rd Camel Battalion received effective artillery support, and the situation was immediately eased. Towards evening a **general advance** was ordered. All troops had been marching and fighting without a moment's respite for more than thirty-six hours, but still the attack was made with great spirit. Lieutenant E. W. Dixon led a force of the Camels against Tel Khuweilfe. The artillery effectively co-operated, the men rushed up the slopes with bayonets and hand-grenades, and after a brief struggle the Turks fled. At the same time the 53rd Division—which had, of course, borne the full brunt of the main attack—made substantial headway. Darkness checked the onslaught, and at daylight on the morning of the 8th it was found that the Turks, whose front had been badly broken towards Sheria, had evacuated the whole Khuweilfe position.

Casualties were heavy, especially in the infantry of the 53rd Division. Among the Australians of the 3rd Camel



KHUWEILFE—POSITION AT DUSK, 7TH NOVEMBER, 1917.

Battalion, Captain R. W. Creswell, and Lieutenant C. H. Lyon¹⁶ and twenty other ranks were killed, and two officers and fifty-two other ranks wounded.

¹⁶ Lieut. C. H. Lyon, 3rd (Anzac) Bn, Imp. Camel Corps. Farmer and contractor; of Harkaway, Vic., and Moora, W. Aust; b. Hawksburn, Melb, Vic., 29 Nov., 1888. Killed in action, 7 Nov., 1917.

CHAPTER XXV

BREAKING THROUGH

At dawn on November 6th, while the confused and bitter fight was developing so unsatisfactorily at Khuweilfe, Chetwode was flinging his three divisions on their grand assault against the Kauwukah positions occupied by the Turkish Seventh Army. The 10th, 60th, and 74th Divisions, with the Yeomanry Mounted Division covering their right flank, had their long and arduous summer training now put to the test. Their assault on the lines south-west of Beersheba had been a trifling preliminary affair. On the morning of the 6th they faced an enemy strong in numbers, and occupying entrenchments wisely placed and prepared by many months of constant labour; the Turkish soldier is a wonderful digger, and had here expended all his energy. On this sector, too, the barbed-wire, if not continuous, was freely used in front of vital spots in the defence. The British barrage was heavy and destructive, but not heavy enough either to demolish powerful earthworks or to keep riflemen and machine-gunners inactive in their trenches. As Chetwode's brigades marched to the assault, they had, as his original scheme intended, some advantage in the possession of higher ground; but the country was pitilessly naked of bushes or any other cover, and the leading waves of infantry were exposed to machine-gunners and to every expert Turkish rifleman.

Many light horsemen of the Australian Mounted Division watched that British advance; and they never afterwards tired of paying tribute to the splendid steadiness of the "Tommies," as, nobly led by their battalion officers, they advanced surely and resistlessly under hellish fire upon the enemy's lines. The 74th Division on the right had a particularly difficult sector, and was more than once temporarily checked. But every man and officer under Chetwode was completely confident of victory, and men in such a mood are not frustrated by obstacles and heavy losses. By about 1 o'clock the division had gained all its objectives, and by

2.30 the 60th and 10th Divisions had smashed through the main Kauwukah defences. The 60th, under Major-General J. S. M. Shea,¹ a great-hearted division of little Londoners, who in subsequent operations east of Jordan were to become very dear to the hearts of Australians, captured the Sheria railway station towards evening. The wady crossing there is dominated by the huge mound of Tel el Sheria, and Shea intended to carry this with the bayonet in the darkness. But the enemy fired a large dump in the neighbourhood, and the flames so illuminated the countryside that the operation was deemed inadvisable. The British therefore bivouacked south of the wady.

The day's victorious fighting had completed the destruction of the whole enemy left. Khuweilfe was now in hourly danger of being isolated, and the enemy's continued resistance there was useless. The centre of his great line was in imminent danger, and the way was clear for Chauvel with Desert Mounted Corps to advance on Jemmameh and Huj with a blow which would menace the whole of the enemy's communications and imperil his force between Sheria and the sea.

Even before Chetwode's decisive blow on the 6th, the Turk realised the danger which threatened not only his defences but his whole army. Bulfin's blow between Gaza and the sea on November 2nd had severely shaken his confidence in his hold on that sector. He was uneasy about Gaza, and was preparing to evacuate, a decision prompted, perhaps by the renewal of the terrific bombardment by Bulfin's heavy guns and the Navy, which recommenced on the 5th and was continued on the following day. On the morning of the 7th, when Bulfin attacked on both sides of Gaza, the resistance was feeble. Before 8 o'clock the notorious Ali Muntar position was in the possession of the 75th Division; a little earlier the 54th Division had advanced along the coast past Gaza to the line from Sheikh Redwan (the knoll occupied by a squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment under Major Bolingbroke on March 26th) to the sea; two mounted squadrons, riding along the beach, had pushed on towards the

¹General Sir J. S. M. Shea, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of Indian Regular Army. b. St. John's, Newfoundland, 17 Jan., 1869.



BRIGADIER-GENERAL W. GRANT, COMMANDER OF THE 4TH AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE 1917-19

Arch. Hist. Museum Official Photo No. B754

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CAPTAIN J. R. CAIN, COMMANDER OF THE 2ND AUSTRALIAN MACHINE-GUN SQUADRON.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B463.

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north. At 9 o'clock Gaza was entered by the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade. An hour later the Lowlanders of the 52nd Division, marching along the beach, took over the lead from the 54th Division, and began an advance which, after a stiff fight with the 53rd Turkish Division, carried them on to the high ground north of the mouth of the Wady Hesi.

The town of Gaza, when entered by the cavalry, told a grim story of its occupation by a hard-pressed and filthy army, and of the effects of the British bombardment. Once again the British were to marvel at the Turk's amazing neglect of sanitation, and his capacity to survive and fight stoutly under conditions impossible to Western troops. The town had been severely handled by the guns; but most of the destruction which nearly every building had suffered was due to the Turks themselves. They had systematically wrecked the crowded houses along the narrow, crooked streets, and stripped them of every scrap of timber in order torevet their trenches on the sand-dunes. The great mosque, a stately building, which was originally a Christian church founded in the 12th century, had been shattered and partially demolished by British gun-fire—an act decided upon only when it was established beyond doubt that the Germans had used it as a large dump for munitions. As a rule the British policy of respecting Moslem holy places, and even ordinary property, was carried to extremes; and the Germans, knowing this, no doubt believed that munitions stored in the mosque would enjoy complete safety. The civil population had been evacuated some time before; when the cavalry rode in, they found the place deserted, except for its filth and evil smells. Australians who pushed through the town a little later could scarcely recognise its environments. Where on March 26th there had been to the north wide olive-groves, and towards the sea fine palm-plantations, they found open plains; the Turk had taken the timber for firing his railway engines and strengthening his trenches.

While the divisions of the XXI Corps at Gaza were advancing swiftly, and almost unresisted where they had expected extremely heavy and expensive fighting, the XX Corps on the right was completing the fine work which they had carried so far on the day before. On the early morning of

the 7th, the line of the XX Corps extended from Khurbet Um el Bakr on the right through Khurbet Barrata to the Sheria railway station, and thence to a point close to the Hareira Redoubt. Allenby hoped that day to make his decisive north-west blow at the enemy's rear and communications. While the infantry seized Tel el Sheria and the Hareira Redoubt, Chauvel's mounted troops, skirting the flank or driving through the Turkish resistance, were to seize the water, first at Jemmameh and then at Huj. The 60th Division, after taking Tel el Sheria, was also to fight its way forward to Huj, for which operation it had been placed under the command of Desert Mounted Corps. All arms were to be advanced with the greatest energy; for Allenby recognised that, if the resistance could be destroyed in the early morning and the enemy rapidly pursued, the rout and capture of the bulk of the Turkish army was more than a possibility.

The day opened well for the British plan. The 10th Infantry Division rushed the Hareira Redoubt in the early morning, despite heavy opposition from machine-guns, and the 60th Division after a hard fight seized the great mound at Sheria. Driven from Tel el Sheria, the Turks retired to a line about a mile and a half behind, on a long, gentle, bare slope leading up from the wady; here they were re-formed and, digging vigorously, soon found cover on ground which gave them an excellent zone of fire. The Londoners, going on with great dash, marched against this position, which was then, with the exception of a line of isolated posts extending towards Khuweilfe, almost on the extreme flank of the enemy's defences. The attacking force, however, was light, breathless, and spent; the enemy, sweeping the slope with shrapnel, machine-guns, and rifle-fire, brought it to a standstill, and the Londoners were compelled to lie down on their advanced line and wait for assistance.

Meanwhile the Anzac and the Australian Mounted Divisions were in readiness for an opportunity to deliver a mounted blow. Immediately after Tel el Sheria was captured by the Londoners, Chauvel, accompanied by Brigadier-General R. G. H. Howard-Vyse,² his chief of staff, climbed up to the

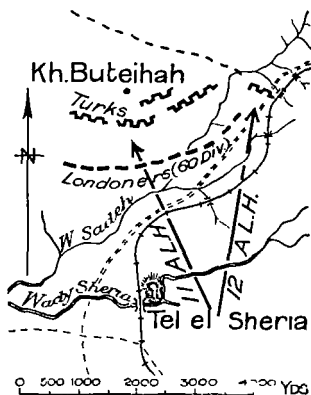
² Maj-Gen. Sir R. G. H. Howard-Vyse, KCMG., DSO, psc. Officer of British Regular Army; of Northampton, Eng; b. London, Eng., 27 June, 1883.

mound and reviewed the position ahead. At that time Hodgson, with the 4th Light Horse Brigade and the 5th Mounted Brigade, was about three miles behind Tel el Sheria. Chaytor, with the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades (less two squadrons and eight machine-guns), was, after a heavy night march, a few miles away to the west. Barrow's Yeomanry Division on the right flank did not engage in the drive to the north-west. The New Zealand Brigade was in support to the 53rd Division and the Camels, who were so heavily engaged at Khuweilfe.

The check to the Londoners on the slope beyond Sheria seriously hampered the success of the British plan. If accepted, it meant a day's delay at least to Shea's advance towards Huj, and also delay to Chauvel's mounted divisions. Chauvel from his height on the mound had the situation clearly in sight; he resolved to employ Hodgson's two brigades in an attempt to smash through the Turkish resistance. Soon after 10 o'clock Hodgson received from Chauvel's headquarters orders to "clear the enemy from the front of the 60th Division." This order was afterwards the subject of much discussion and criticism. Hodgson's obvious line of advance against the Turkish resistance was to move by the east, make touch with the Anzacs, and take the enemy on his exposed flank. But the order he received from Desert Mounted Corps was a specific one. He was to march north-west from Tel el Sheria through defined squares on the map of operations, with his centre on a mud hut at Khurbet Buteihah, on the ridge behind the Turkish line of defences. This committed him to an advance through the ranks of the Londoners, and then through the Turks. Success was only possible on the supposition that the Turks would again become flustered, as they did at Beersheba, by the galloping advance of Hodgson's horsemen.

The desperate mission was entrusted to Grant's 4th Light Horse Brigade, which was ordered to cross the wady mounted and strike hard for Khurbet Buteihah. The 5th Mounted Brigade was to move to the wady in readiness to support, while touch was to be made with the Anzacs on the right. Chauvel, when he gave his order, had expected that Hodgson's horsemen would move immediately; but it was nearly 11

o'clock before the 11th and 12th Light Horse Regiments rode towards the crossing over the wady. Meanwhile the Turkish riflemen ahead were each minute improving their cover and completing their line. As the Australians approached the wady, shrapnel burst freely over the trotting horses. The 11th Regiment under Major P. J. Bailey^a was on the left, with the 12th led by Cameron to the right. At this time the horses had been twenty-eight hours without a drink; as the wady contained a little water, a brief, although, perhaps, an unfortunate halt was made while they drank greedily, despite the bursting of shells close overhead. It was clear that heavy punishment awaited the regiments as soon as they reached the northern bank, and that pace alone could give the attack any chance of success. The leading squadrons therefore urged their horses on, and trotted and cantered up the steep tracks on the other side. As they emerged, they rode into shafts of machine-gun and heavy rifle fire at effective range. Cameron on the right decided at once that there was no opportunity here for a second "Beersheba"; he dismounted one of his squadrons and sent back the horses, while the men advanced on foot.



Another squadron, galloping forward about 500 yards, also dismounted and went to work with the rifle.

On the left two squadrons of the 11th, deploying as they cleared the wady, went forward at the gallop. On this sector the line of the British infantry was close to the wady. Careless of the heavy fire, and riding hard, they passed many dead Londoners who had fallen earlier in the morning, and dashed on through the advanced riflemen beyond. The gallant Cockneys, remembering Beersheba, rose and cheered them as they went by. But the opposing fire, wild when first the light horsemen left the wady, was now steadier and more accurate.

^a Col. P. J. Bailey, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 11th L.H. Regt., 1918/19. Auctioneer; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 28 Sept., 1882.

The leaders saw, like Cameron, that the low-lying Turks were not to be demoralised by two slender squadrons, and a few hundred yards beyond the infantry the order was given to halt, the horses were rushed back, and the men, lying close to the ground, opened fire with their rifles.

But one of the troops of Major E. Costello's⁴ squadron missed the signal to dismount and galloped on. With their leader, Lieutenant A. R. Brierty,⁵ at their head, this little party of twenty-one light horsemen spurred straight at a group of shallow Turkish entrenchments. The rifle-fire was terrific, but the pace saved the Australians, and when they came within a few horse-lengths of the advanced line the Turks raised their hands. Brierty led the troop over the little trench at the gallop; then, with enemy riflemen all round them, the men flung themselves from their saddles to rush in with the bayonet. As they halted, the Turks who had surrendered opened fire with their rifles at a few yards' range, and the other troops all round joined in the shooting. In a few seconds every Australian horse had fallen, eleven men had been killed, and the rest of the troop, except one, wounded. The disaster was so complete that relief was purposeless, but Lieutenant J. S. Bartlett,⁶ a fellow troop leader of Brierty's, advanced boldly from the left with a Hotchkiss and nine riflemen, got into a good position, and shot down a number of Turks who were moving from their trenches towards Brierty's party. Twenty Turks and one German officer were afterwards found dead there in a heap. Of Bartlett's party of ten, four were killed and three wounded.

The remaining men of the two squadrons were now precariously placed some hundred yards in front of the infantry, and the Turks concentrated their fire upon them, at the same time creeping forward with the bayonet. The ground gave very little cover, but the light horsemen hung on all day, shooting in that terribly deliberate, sure way which always distinguished them in bitter fire-fights. Bailey, fearing the Turks would close in overwhelming numbers, ran back to the

⁴ Maj. E. Costello, D.S.O. 11th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Warwick, Q'land; b. Thane's Creek, Q'land. 7 Feb., 1883.

⁵ Lieut. A. R. Brierty, M.C. 11th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Bulloo District, Q'land; b. Norley Station, Q'land, 8 March, 1894.

⁶ Capt. J. S. Bartlett, 11th L.H. Regt. Selector; of Atherton, Q'land; b. Sheffield, Eng., 15 Aug., 1891.

line of the Londoners and persuaded a young officer to dash forward with a machine-gun. The officer and two of his gunners were killed, but the gun was very finely handled by a young British private. "He was," said Bailey, "the coolest man I ever saw." Later on two other machine-guns were brought forward into the open, and the Turkish counter-movement was arrested.

During the afternoon a call was made for stretcher-bearers at the 11th Regiment's headquarters just south of the wady. Chaplain W. J. Dunbar,⁷ the regimental "Padre," an Australian Methodist clergyman who had joined the light horse as a trooper and had been promoted in the field, was among those who at once volunteered. Crossing the wady on his horse Dunbar rode forward under heavy fire, the one horseman on the landscape, to some little straw-stacks, where he engaged in dressing a number of wounded men. While he was there Trooper W. P. Forster,⁸ who had been with Brierty and had been only slightly wounded, rose from amidst the mass of dead horses, and, avoiding the Turks, ran towards the wady. Dunbar, despite the protests of a few men at the straw-stacks, at once dashed out to meet him. As Forster ran, the German machine-gunners opened fire. For some time the bullets cut up the dust close behind him; and, as he went on unhit, and the chaplain ran to join him, every Londoner and Australian lying on the exposed slope and breathlessly watching the two men, prayed for their escape. Forster was hit and fell. But he rose at once and, staggering on, met Dunbar; then both men, coming under a stream of bullets, were killed.

Towards sunset the light horsemen rejoiced to see waves of the reserve brigade of the 60th Division advancing from their left rear. The brigade came on steadily despite heavy Turkish shelling. It was dusk when they reached the Australians, who cheered them as they had themselves been cheered by the Londoners in the morning. But this was no madcap exploit by a few horsemen. The infantrymen had strength and depth. "How far away are the blighters?" asked a sergeant. "Five hundred yards," replied an Australian.

⁷ Chaplain the Rev. W. J. Dunbar. Attached 11th L.H. Regt.; b. Orange, N.S.W., 3 July, 1880. Killed in action, 7 Nov., 1917.

⁸ Pte. W. P. Forster (No. 1181, 11th L.H. Regt.) Farmer; b. Doncaster, Yorks, Eng., 3 Feb., 1896. Killed in action, 7 Nov., 1917.

"Then in five minutes," said the Londoner, "we'll be into them." Some of the Australians rose to join in the sport, and marched away with the infantry into the growing darkness; a few minutes later those who remained heard a hoarse roar above the rattle of the machine-gun and rifle fire. The Londoners had charged home with the bayonet; the Turkish resistance was finally broken, and the gateway to Palestine was open.

But the day's fighting on this position was to have far-reaching effects on Allenby's great design against the Turkish rear. Gaza had been evacuated early that morning, and the main Turkish army was already in full retreat up the maritime plain towards Huj. Had Allenby's plan been carried through, had the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions reached Huj that day, complete disaster might have overtaken the enemy. But the holding up of the 60th Division and Australian Mounted Division at Sheria prevented these troops from joining up with the Anzacs; and Chaytor, with only the 1st Light Horse Brigade and part of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, less most of its machine-gun squadron, was obliged to advance alone. The Anzacs were not only greatly reduced in numbers, but were advancing, with both their flanks exposed, against constant opposition; although they fought dashing and travelled fast, they were unable to strike decisively.

Khuweilfe and the water difficulties had combined greatly to reduce Chauvel's corps at the moment when its full striking strength was so urgently needed for the blow at the enemy's rear. Not only was the corps scattered, but the brigades which were on the move that morning were already jaded from excessive marching and prolonged lack of sleep, and many of the horses were in distress from lack of water. Only two of the seventeen wells at Beersheba had been completely destroyed by the Turks; and in the days which followed the capture of the town every resource, and all the energy of the engineers and working parties of the mounted troops, were strained to develop the supply to its full capacity. Pumps driven by oil engines which had been carried forward by tractors were soon working at full capacity; in other wells the old-fashioned cattle-driven water-wheels, with their endless

ropes and clay buckets, were in full swing day and night. Happily the Turks had been so demoralised by the great charge that they had left intact two reservoirs containing 90,000 gallons. By the morning of November 4th the flow from the wells had reached 390,000 gallons a day, which was only 10,000 gallons short of estimated requirements after the Australian Mounted Division had been withdrawn to Karm. But the ceaseless marching of the brigades to and from Khuweilfe, the long intervals between drinks, and the strain imposed on the 2nd Light Horse Brigade east of the Hebron road (where supplies were always short), had in one week sorely reduced the condition and physical endurance of the horses. The thirst of those wearing days was further accentuated by a violent and prolonged khamsin. For three days and nights the wind, heavily charged with fine dust, blew in hot from the south-eastern desert, drying up the rain-pools and distressing man and horse. Ryrie's brigade had arrived at Beersheba at 1 o'clock on the afternoon of the 6th. Watering was at once commenced, but, when it was only half completed, orders were received to join Anzac Mounted Division four miles north-west of the town. Marching all night in clouds of dust, the division arrived about four miles west of Sheria before dawn, where they received the welcome news of the infantry's success on the 6th, and knew that the road was clear for a great mounted endeavour.

Between Sheria and Khuweilfe on the morning of the 7th the line of the Turks was weak. While the 60th Division was to carry the high ground north of Tel el Sheria, and allow the Australian Mounted Division to pass through, Chaytor was to drive through the opposition towards the north-west, seize the enemy's ammunition dump on the railway at Ameidat, and then with the Australian Mounted Division ride north-west with all speed across the enemy's communications. Cox with the 1st Brigade was to have moved in the lead at 5 a.m.; but owing to bad roads the batteries had been unable to reach the point of concentration in the darkness, and it was nearly 6.30 before the brigade was on the march. By 7.15 Cox had reached a position on the Wady Sheria just east of Khurbet Um el Bakr. Riding briskly with the 2nd Brigade in support, the advance-guard of the 1st was within striking

distance of Ameidat at 10.45. Cox's regiments, as they travelled, had been constantly, though not heavily, shelled from the east and the north-west, but so far there was no serious opposition.

When the brigade was within three miles of Ameidat, the 2nd Regiment on the left was in touch with the extreme right of the troops of the 60th Division who were held up north of Tel el Sheria. The 1st and 3rd Regiments were echeloned on the right. The country was clear, and the going good. Passing the infantry, and with their left flank now exposed, the squadrons of the 2nd increased the pace to the gallop, and swooped with loud shouts on Ameidat. Except for shell-fire at long ranges there was little resistance, and in a few minutes the light horsemen had dashed past the railway station, and were rounding up startled Turks who were surrendering readily on all sides. Thirty-one officers and 360 other ranks were made prisoner; and the captures included 250 shells, 200,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 27 ammunition waggons, a complete field hospital, and a great quantity of stores.

The enemy gunners at once began to shell the dumps, and Cox pushed out reconnaissance squadrons to Tel en Nejile and Khurbet Jemmameh. A line running eastwards from Tel Abu Dilakh was found to be held in strength; as this barred the advance to Huj, persistent attempts were made during the afternoon to shift the enemy from the village of Dilakh. At 12.30 Chauvel informed Chaytor that Gaza had fallen, and ordered him to advance at once on Jenmameh, towards which large bodies of Turks were reported to be retreating. Cox's attack on Dilakh, however, could make but little headway. The village was placed on a commanding knoll; the enemy, alive to the menace to his rear, was bringing up reinforcements, and opened on the Australians with a battery from a point north of the village. Chaytor therefore decided to attack it with the 2nd Brigade.

The 5th Regiment, with about one and a half miles to cover, moved on Dilakh at the gallop. The Turks greeted this advance with salvoes of shrapnel and high explosive, and the light horse were at once enshrouded in clouds of dust and smoke from the shells. Cameron's men gained part of the

high ground near Dilakh, but found that the guns were firing from a village beyond. Unable to advance further in the failing light, they established a line and held on during the night. Casualties in the regiment had been light, but Lieutenant C. R. Morley⁹ was mortally wounded in the charge. At dawn on the 8th the regiment carried the position and rode against the guns to the north-west. Already the Turks were evacuating their positions, and Captain J. McC. Boyd,¹⁰ with the advanced squadron, had a hard gallop after two guns which were being hurried towards the Wady Hesi. Fine dash was shown by the leading troop-leader, Lieutenant E. G. Ogg,¹¹ and the guns and their teams and escort were secured.

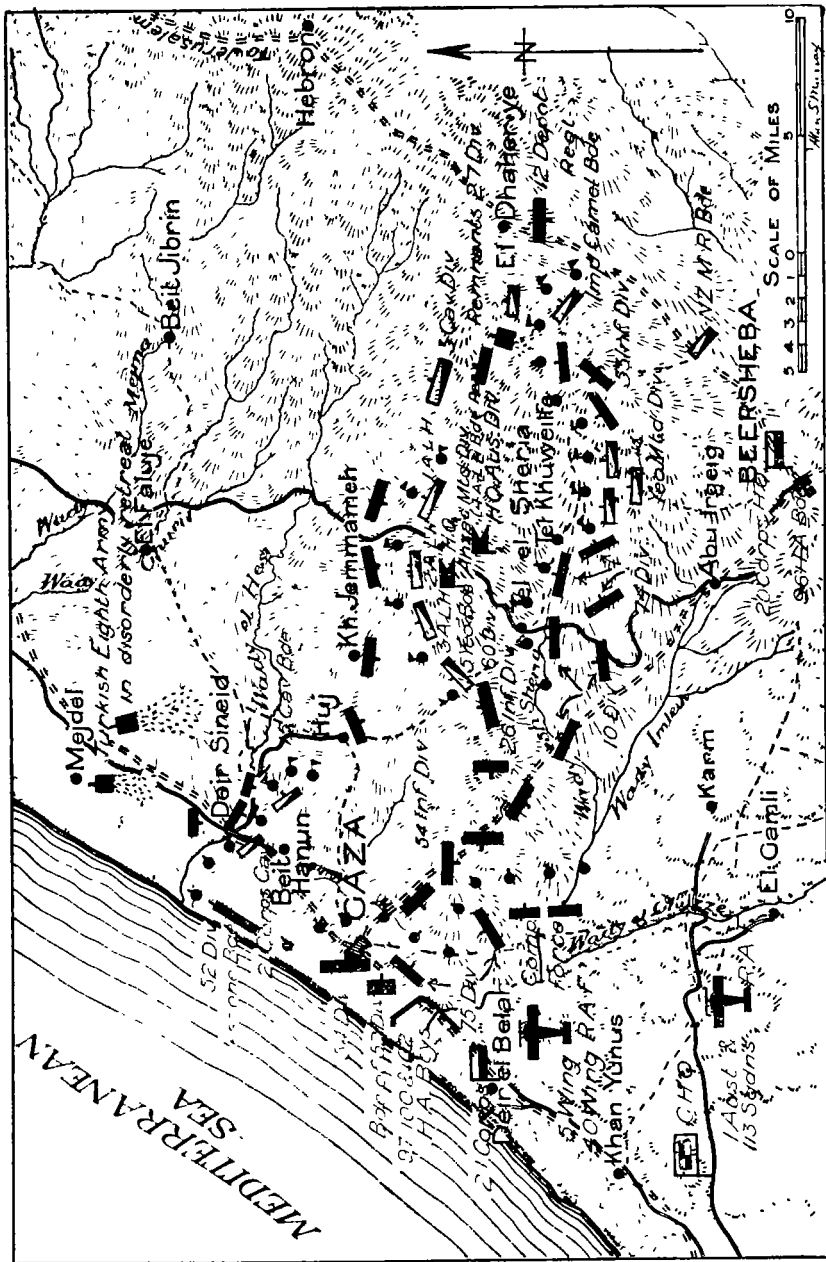
All through the afternoon of the 7th Chaytor had looked out anxiously but vainly for Hodgson's brigades. He fully recognised that the opportunity which offered for a blow at the enemy's line of retreat was each hour slipping away. But he was powerless. At 4.30 all his troops, with the exception of two squadrons of the 1st Brigade, were in the firing line. His horses had not been watered since leaving Beersheba, and many of them had missed the drink there. A few squadrons found water during the day, but some regiments were already threatened with prostration. He therefore decided to abandon for the day the attempt to reach Jemmameh, and to rest on his ground, watering as many horses as possible during the night.

That night Cameron, of the 12th Regiment, was ordered to proceed at dawn to make touch with the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade at Beit Hanun. This brigade, after moving through Gaza, was on the left of the Turks from the Atawineh part of the old line, who were heading for Huj and the north. Cameron, trotting with his men immediately in rear of the retreating enemy, carried orders to the brigadier to endeavour to cut across the head of the Turkish columns and make Huj, where he would be joined by the 60th and Australian Mounted Divisions. The 12th covered the ten and a half miles in an

⁹ Lieut. C. R. Morley, 5th L.H. Regt. Secretary; of Tweed Heads, N.S.W.; b. Mackay, Q'land, 25 Dec., 1894. Died of wounds, 8th Nov., 1917.

¹⁰ Maj. J. McC. Boyd, M.C.; 5th L.H. Regt. Salesman; of Rockhampton, Q'land, b. Ahoghill, Co. Antrim, Ireland, 2 Aug., 1889. Died, 8 Oct., 1925.

¹¹ Lieut. E. G. Ogg, M.C. 5th L.H. Regt. Station hand; of Blackall, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, Q'land, 17 March, 1894.



"BREAKING THROUGH," 10 P.M., 7TH NOVEMBER, 1917.

hour and a half; but before Cameron reached the Imperial Service Brigade the Turks were already streaming past Huj, and no action could be taken. Cameron afterwards rejoined his division at Huj.

On the 8th the Anzac Mounted Division was ordered by Chauvel to strike for Jemmameh and the 60th Division for Huj, with the Australian Mounted Division advancing in the gap between them. The 52nd Division, with the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, was to advance as rapidly as possible up the coast, and it was hoped that even yet the gap between Chauvel's horsemen and the advanced infantry along the sea-board might be closed in time to cut off the escape of large enemy forces. If in the opening days of the battle the General Staff of the Turkish army had made blunders, it now had a sound grip of the situation. The enemy, by holding up Chauvel's advance from the south-east towards Huj, until his main force had retreated past that place, had saved his army from destruction. With his flanks now secure from the British cavalry, he would be able to offer stout rear-guard resistance.

The 60th Division marched finely throughout the day of the 8th, with the Australian Mounted Division on its right. The resistance of the Turks, although broken, was persistent, and three times their rear-guard held up the Londoners. Further west the 75th Infantry Division occupied Tank Redoubt, Atawineh, and other trench systems with but slight opposition. On the extreme left the Lowlanders of the 52nd Division seized high ground north-west of Deir Sineid. Four times during the day the Scots were driven off this position by greatly superior Turkish forces which advanced from Askalon; but each time they returned to the charge, and on the fifth occasion cleared the ground with the bayonet and held it.

Unfortunately, on this day of great possibilities for the mounted troops, the Yeomanry Division, which was still quite fresh, the New Zealand Brigade, and the Camel Brigade were all still on the extreme right flank. Circumstances, as we have seen, had broken up Desert Mounted Corps at the critical moment. With orders to move first on Jemmameh and thence towards Burier, Chaytor, with Anzac Mounted Division,

pushed out a reconnaissance at dawn. Early in the morning the 2nd Brigade on the right occupied the line Tel en Nejile-Wady Hesi. Considerable shelling and general opposition made progress slow, and an hour later the 7th Mounted Brigade, which had been sent to reinforce Chaytor, was ordered in between the two light horse brigades. As Chaytor's men went forward, the evil consequences of the day's delay at Sheria were strikingly disclosed to them. From each successive ridge they saw the wide plain extending towards the coastal sand-dunes, and on it column after column of the Turkish army hurrying to the north. But so far the enemy was safe. As the excited Australians and yeomanry observed what might have been the realisation of every cavalryman's dream—as each regimental or squadron leader instinctively pulled himself together for the charge—they were reminded by resistance immediately ahead that in the past twenty-four hours the enemy had been enabled to protect his flank against their galloping sweep. The 5th Light Horse Regiment was scarcely clear of the Dilakh position before it was vigorously attacked by enemy infantry and compelled to withdraw its advance-guards. A similar check was imposed on the squadrons of the 6th. Finding good cover in the wadys and rough ground in front of Jemmameh, the Turks were offering resistance strong enough to serve their purpose. For a time the 7th Mounted Brigade in the centre had a clear advance; but soon after noon the British also were arrested, and then subjected to a solid counter-attack which continued for more than three hours. The yeomanry, who stood firm and shot down large numbers of the advancing infantry, were relieved when the 1st Light Horse Brigade took Jemmameh.

Cox's men, fighting for Jemmameh, made a slow dismounted attack, and it was not until after 3 o'clock that troops of the 3rd Regiment entered the village, having in the final assault been pushed through the advanced line of the 2nd. In itself the village was important, for in addition to 200 prisoners the captures included a considerable reservoir with its pumping plant, two howitzers, two machine-guns, and a quantity of other important material. But in view of the delay, these trophies were of little consequence. The 2nd Light Horse Regiment at once resumed the advance, but was again held

up on ridges west of Jemmameh, and Cox's headquarters were still in the village at nightfall. As the division advanced on Jemmameh, touch had been gained with the Australian Mounted Division on the left, and the 10th Light Horse Regiment on Hodgson's right flank had co-operated in the earlier stages of the attack on the village.

The Anzac line was then advanced to cover the water at Jemmameh and Nejile, and the Turks again countered in strength against the 5th and 7th Light Horse Regiments. From 3,000 to 5,000 infantry, supported by a number of guns, advanced with the bayonet to drive Chaytor's men back from the water. Had this attempt been successful, their retreat would have been assured. But, although the Australians had only about 500 men in the firing line, they occupied good ground, and, as one of their leaders said, "they never shot so calmly and surely in their lives." In places Turks came within forty yards of the slender line, but the main body was held at about 700 yards. The fight fizzled out at dark; and during the night the enemy, recognising that these swift-riding, straight-shooting horsemen, refreshed by the water, would become very active and dangerous again in the morning, withdrew for some miles. Turkish casualties were heavy; one shallow trench contained twenty-one dead, all shot through the head—a fact which demonstrated the quality of the Australian work with the rifle.

It was now imperative that Chaytor should at once water the horses of his two Australian brigades. With few exceptions all the animals had been without a drink for fifty hours, and some longer. All that time they had been ridden hard under their twenty-stone burdens, and for more than twenty-four hours, in consequence of their extreme thirst, had refused to eat their scanty ration of grain. But despite their distress they were, on the evening of the 8th, still gamely answering every call. The plight of the men was scarcely better. They had been sustained by a short ration of water; but they had now been for three days and nights without sleep, and constantly in the saddle or fighting on foot. That night, therefore, the horses were fully watered at Jemmameh and Nejile—as many as possible twice—and the men, if they got little or no rest, were happy in the relief of their treasured

chargers. The affection of the light horseman for his horse was always demonstrated in these seasons of trial, and it was not uncommon to see a man pour out the slender contents of his own water-bottle on his hand or a tin plate, to wet the parched mouth of his waler.

While the Anzac Mounted Division had to be content with the capture of Jemmameh, better fortune attended Hodgson's Australian Division, which advanced with the 60th Division on Huj. On the night of the 7th, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Wilson was ordered at all costs to occupy the line Wady Jemmameh-Zuheilkah at dawn on the 8th; thus Wilson would have the 5th Mounted Brigade on his left, and was to make touch with the Anzacs on his right. The 3rd and the yeomanry were then to march on Huj, covering the right flank of the 60th Division. Moving before dawn, the 9th and 10th Regiments of Wilson's brigade met with stiff opposition as the day disclosed them to the enemy. The Turks occupied favourable ground with scattered entrenchments, and were only dislodged after a spirited dismounted attack by the Australians, who were supported by good shooting at close ranges by the Notts Battery. By 10 o'clock the 5th Mounted Brigade was in touch on the left, and the enemy was being driven in large numbers and at a smart pace towards Huj.

At the same time the Londoners of the 60th were swinging forward grandly on the left, beating down a strong Turkish rear-guard in their stride. The spirit and endurance of the division shone out even at this time, when all Allenby's infantry was behaving superbly. They had now been fighting and marching hard for nine days, but their advance across the broken country to Huj was distinguished by the enthusiasm and vigour of perfectly fresh troops. General Shea, a dashing personal leader of men, was travelling with the first waves in a motor-car lent to him by Chauvel, and, picking his way across the many wadys, was doing his own reconnaissance and directing the advance. When within two or three miles of Huj, he observed a strong column of Turks passing across his front a mile and a half away. Between the Londoners and the column lay a stretch of rough, difficult country, and the enemy, observing his advantage, halted and brought a number

of guns into action. But about a mile away to the right Shea saw some troops of the 5th Mounted Brigade pressing forward; driving across, he pointed out the Turkish force to Lieutenant-Colonel Gray-Cheape (who commanded the Warwicks) and asked for his assistance.

Cheape had only ten troops of the Warwicks and Worcesters—about 200 men—but he decided instantly to charge. Rapidly forming his men, he led them at the gallop upon the Turks, riding direct for the guns. The yeomanry had about a mile and a half to go, first down a slope in full view of the gunners, and then across an exposed valley. As the British spurred down the slope, the Turkish guns lifted their fire from the British infantry, and concentrated on the approaching horsemen. Serving their guns rapidly, the artillerymen constantly shortened the range, until, as the shouting yeomanry dashed sword in hand up to the batteries, shells were bursting and scattering widely as they left the muzzles. And while they were ploughed by the shells, the horsemen also rode through a whirl of machine-gun fire. But they spurred right home, sabred the gunners as they served their pieces, and then, re-forming under Cheape, dashed at a nest of machine-guns and killed the crews. In this fine gallop the yeomanry lost heavily; but they were well rewarded for their sacrifice, capturing 11 guns, 3 machine-guns, and 30 prisoners. This splendid exploit enabled the Londoners to continue their rapid advance in comparative safety, and permitted the 3rd Light Horse Brigade a little later to enter the village of Huj. Moreover it decisively smashed the Turkish rear-guard, and not until the enemy reached the Wady Sukereir was he able again to offer stiff resistance.

As the yeomanry charged, they were in full view of the Australians on their right. Earlier in the campaign, when the men of the 5th Brigade were raw and indifferently led, their performance was at times not impressive. But at Huj they showed the traditional mettle of their famous old stock, from which most of the light horsemen were themselves descended; and the Australians were quick to appreciate the fact that British Territorial horsemen must no longer be estimated lightly as campaigners. The charge, coming after the brilliant light horse success at Beersheba, was a severe blow

to the already diminished Turkish spirit, and the news of it, ringing through Chauvel's mounted troops, made all the horsemen and their leaders still more scornful of Turkish resistance if resolutely galloped.

If the main Turkish army had escaped destruction, its condition was serious. From Gaza and the defences to the west of the town the race for safety had been a grim one. All arms were exhausted by the severe bombardment and fighting before they were withdrawn from their trenches. Their communications had been for some days disorganised; their supplies had run short; the troops were hungry and thirsty; and the army, as is common with troops in such circumstances, was sorely afflicted with dysentery. Discipline had gone to the winds; ranks were broken; unit mingled with unit, service with service. Only one motive animated and directed the force and saved it from destruction. Every man knew that safety lay to the north, and all remaining effort in each wretchedly exhausted body was whipped up to conform to the orders of the High Command.

Had Allenby's original plan succeeded—had Chetwode's advance to Sheria been possible on the 4th instead of on the 6th—had Huj, even after the delay, been reached by the 60th Division and the mounted troops on the 7th—the destruction or capture of the bulk of the Turkish army would have been assured. The Commander-in-Chief's foresight and preparations had achieved a great victory, and was only denied its full fruits by two factors beyond his control—the resistance at Khuweilfe, and the absence of water after Beersheba was taken.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREAT DRIVE

NEVER perhaps did leaders of horse look out on a prospect so tantalising as that which the afternoon of the 8th unfolded to Chaytor and Hodgson. Chaytor's case was the easier, because he was until evening still firmly held by the enemy round Jemmameh, and his horses were distressed beyond usefulness. But Hodgson and his brigadiers had, after the charge of the yeomanry, the field open before them. Their horses were badly spent, but were still capable of a sustained gallop. Out on the plain were between 12,000 and 15,000 Turks, apparently in hopeless confusion, and away to the north within a few miles were many thousands more. Two strong divisions of cavalry with swords—even one—might have demoralised and captured the whole of the force. But with all the apparent confusion the enemy had still one cool and vigilant arm among them. Throughout the campaign the German machine-gunners upheld the fighting reputation of their Fatherland. As in the advance on Damascus ten months later, every thrust by the British horse at the scattered Turkish rabble was met by these watchful, fearless, and straight-shooting gunners. When charged by the yeomanry, they and the Austrians on the artillery had served their guns to the last moment, though the Turks fled from around them. As the yeomanry and Wilson's 3rd Light Horse Brigade pressed forward after the charge, the Germans were always strong enough to make it impossible for so small a mounted force as Hodgson commanded that afternoon to break into the Turkish masses and bluff them into wholesale surrender.

The stoutness of this resistance, though exercised only by small flank-guards and rear-guards, is seen in the opposition to the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in the fighting about Huj. As the brigade closed on the village, a number of explosions told of the destruction of ammunition dumps and water-supplies. After the yeomanry's exploit the Turks made no fight to save the place, but streamed out as the light horse approached. Two machine-guns having been placed by

Lieutenant L. G. Lawry¹ on a ridge overlooking the village, Major Parsons, of the 9th, rode in from the right with his squadron. Many of the horses had been fifty-two hours without water; therefore, as the 8th Regiment joined the 9th, prompt steps were taken to prevent further demolition of the wells. Several dumps of shells and great quantities of small arms ammunition and other material were seized intact, and Wilson ordered his three regiments forward in pursuit of the disorganised enemy. The horses of the Notts Battery, however, were too exhausted to proceed further; and the absence of artillery support, the lack of a weapon suitable for shock-tactics, and the state of the horses as a whole prevented the regiments from charging the enemy in strength. A note by General Wilson on the day's fighting is of special interest. "From my subsequent experience of the use of the sword," he wrote, "I consider it would have been invaluable here. If we had had swords, I am sure we could have ridden down and captured thousands; as it was, we stood off and shot hundreds only."

Harassing the right flank of the Turkish column, the 8th, 9th, and 10th Light Horse Regiments cut into the column wherever opportunity offered, and had many exciting little encounters. Major Timperley, with a squadron of the 10th, was on the right flank; riding parallel with the column at a rapid pace, he sought a chance to block and isolate the thousands who brought up its rear. "At that time," says Timperley, "the Turkish force was in absolute chaos. Great numbers had thrown away their rifles; they moved in a mob, with no formation, and with odd camels, mules, and donkeys mingled with the troops. But they hung on to their guns and waggons, and brought the machine-guns into action whenever we threatened them."

The column could not be arrested. One light horse troop under Lieutenant A. W. M. Thompson² sighted an isolated convoy of twenty-one ammunition waggons containing large-calibre shells, drawn by horses and mules. Fixing their

¹ Lieut L. G. Lawry, M.C. 3rd Aust M.G. Sqn. Carpenter's apprentice; of Highton, Geelong, Vic.; b. Newtown, Geelong. 14 Dec., 1895.

² Lieut A. W. M. Thompson, M.C. 10th L.H. Regt. Pearler and agent; b. Fremantle, W. Aust., 27 Aug., 1880.



AN ARAB VILLAGE ON THE PHILISTINE PLAIN

Aust. H. M. Museum Official Photo No. B1037

To face p. 446



THE JEWISH SETTLEMENT OF WADY HANFIN

Amst. Hist. Museum Official Photo No. B446

To face p. 417

bayonets, they charged mounted; but as they reached the waggons they came under the unfailing fire of the German machine-gunners and were forced to withdraw. Half a squadron of Turkish cavalry then attempted to save the convoy, but Thompson, from a good position across the wady, scattered the horsemen with Hotchkiss and rifle fire. With this fire as cover, Thompson then rode forward with Sergeant Spencer Gwynne and two other men to bring out the convoy. But some of the horses had been shot, and the enemy fire was troublesome; the little party of Australians therefore shot sixty horses in the teams, and so denied the waggons to the enemy.

In the afternoon's fighting the brigade took several guns. One of these was galloped by a patrol under Lieutenant G. L. H. Mueller,³ and the team of bullocks was shot after all the efforts of the Australians to drive the little Turkish bullocks had failed. Lieutenant W. H. Lilly,⁴ of the machine-gun squadron, advancing boldly with two guns, destroyed the team of another, and afterwards co-operated with Lieutenant F. J. MacGregor,⁵ of the 10th Light Horse, in the capture of a third. This gun, a 5.9-inch howitzer, was in action against the Australians at a range of 1,600 yards, and MacGregor saw the enemy bringing up teams for its withdrawal; he therefore, with Lilly covering his advance with a machine-gun, rode forward with four men, captured a German officer with the crew of the gun, and under heavy fire shot the team of animals. Lieutenant L. M. S. Hargrave,⁶ of the 9th Light Horse, with his troop, supported by a troop under Lieutenant P. T. Smith,⁷ had a similar fight for a 15-cm. gun. The Turks advanced in strength to save this piece, but were held up by the fire of the troopers, while Hargrave and Smith, charging mounted with a small party, destroyed the team. Two other guns, retreating north-west from Jemnameh, were

³ Lieut. G. L. H. Mueller (name changed in 1921 to H. Melrose), 9th L.H. Regt. Importer and exporter, of Adelaide, S. Aust.; b East Adelaide, 24 July, 1886.

⁴ Lieut W. H. Lilly, No. 1 Sqdn, Aust. Flying Corps. Clerk, of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust., b. North Melbourne, Vic., 12 July, 1892.

⁵ Lieut F. J. MacGregor, M.C. 10th L.H. Regt. Farmer, b Dundee, Scotland, 1889.

⁶ Lieut L. M. S. Hargrave, M.C. 9th L.H. Regt. Student, of Belair, S. Aust.; b. Rose Park, Adelaide, S. Aust., 13 Aug., 1895.

⁷ Lieut. P. E. Smith D.C.M. 10th L.H. Regt. Law clerk; of Crafers, S. Aust. b. Perth, W. Aust., 15 Oct, 1895.

pursued by Lieutenant R. H. Borbidge,* of the 8th Light Horse. Riding up close under fire, Borbidge dismounted his troop, shot the team of one gun, and forced the second into a wady, where it turned over. Both were captured.

Late in the afternoon, twenty-eight British and Australian aeroplanes flew over Huj in bombing formation on a raid to the north. By day and night, since the opening of the battle, the airmen had contributed substantially to the growing demoralisation of the Turkish forces. Aerodromes, railway junctions, dumps, and troops in close formation had been persistently and effectively bombed and machine-gunned. Just prior to the attack the Germans had diverted to Palestine a large number of aeroplanes which had been intended for Mesopotamia, but these arrived just too late to be of service. Most of them were still in their cases on the various aerodromes, where they were destroyed by British pilots or burned by the retiring enemy. On the 8th the aerodrome at Arak el Menshiye was twice raided. Two hundred bombs were dropped, and forty-eight hits were made on ten hostile machines seen on the ground. On this day, too, a German machine was shot down in flames near the Wady Hesi; but so complete was now the mastery of Allenby's pilots that, after the opening day's fighting at Beersheba, very few enemy airmen were seen. The Germans, recognising the British superiority, declined to leave the ground, and the enemy High Command was in consequence much disabled. During this period the No. 1 Australian Flying Squadron, in addition to much activity in raiding, was entrusted with the photographic work. Each day its pilots obtained detailed records of the country and the enemy's dispositions immediately ahead of the advancing British formations; and so perfect was the machinery that maps showing the result of these photographs were issued each evening to division and brigade commands.

Although the Turks had escaped the trap laid for them between the 52nd Division and the cavalry and the 60th Division at Huj, Allenby still hoped on the evening of the 8th that, in view of the confusion and increasing demoralisation, a large part of the enemy forces might still be overridden

* Capt. R. H. Borbidge, M.C. 8th L.H. Regt Butcher; of Ararat, Vic., b Burrumbeet, Vic., 1886.

and forced to surrender. He therefore ordered Chauvel to make every effort to reach a line from Et Tine to Beit Duras on the 9th, "as obtaining this line may complete the destruction of the Turkish army." When at daylight on the 8th the Turks were found to have evacuated the Khuweilfe position, Barrow's Yeomanry Division was unfortunately ordered by Allenby to pursue towards Hebron. The rough nature of the country made progress slow; although a few stragglers were picked up, it was quickly recognised that the division—which up to this time had taken little part in the operations and was still fresh and strong—could be more profitably engaged on the western side. On the evening of the 8th Barrow therefore received orders to ride with all speed to Huj. His troops were at the time widely scattered, and the day of the 9th was well advanced before he reported on the west.

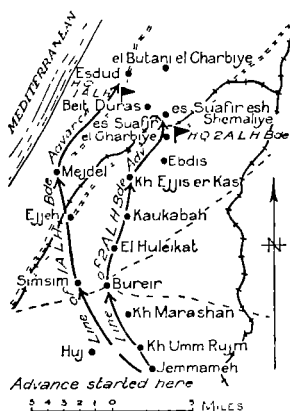
But the real obstacle to the fulfilment of Allenby's wishes was again water. Anzac Mounted Division was, as we have shown, watering on the evening of the 8th round Jemmameh and Nejile. By working hard all night, most of the horses of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and the 7th Mounted Brigade had been watered, and were ready to move on the morning of the 9th. But Hodgson's troops were not so fortunate. The Turks had destroyed most of the wells at Huj, and the horses of the Australian Mounted Division had to be sent to the already overtaxed supplies at Jemmameh. There they waited until the parched Anzacs were satisfied, and not until late in the afternoon of the 9th were they returned to their riders about Huj. The Yeomanry Division suffered a similar delay; consequently two of the three mounted divisions were on this day out of action—an irreparable loss of time at a stage in the pursuit which, despite the delay, might still have been decisive.

On the morning of the 9th Allenby again urged Chauvel to press on by the shortest route with all his available force to the Et Tine-Beit Duras line. The XXI Corps was to march to Julis and Mejdal in support, and to form a pivot of manœuvre for the mounted troops. The enemy was to be "pressed relentlessly."

With his horses refreshed, but with his men exhausted

by continued marching, fighting, and sleeplessness, Chaytor, after sending out strong reconnaissances before daylight, moved forward at 6 o'clock on the morning of the 9th. Ryrie's brigade on the right, with the 5th and 7th Light Horse Regiments in advance and the 6th in support, marched on Khurbet Umm Rujm-Khurbet el Marashan-Bureir, and the 1st Light Horse Brigade on the left struck for Simsim. The 7th Mounted Brigade was in reserve. This proved to be the day of the enemy's greatest disorganisation. Again and again the Australians encountered large bodies of Turkish stragglers, who offered very little resistance. Had the three divisions been available for the pursuit, Allenby's hopes as to the capture of troops and guns on a grand scale would probably have been realised. After November 9th the enemy's rear-guard stiffened; and, when once he was able to rest and refresh his beaten troops with food and water, his retreat became in the main orderly.

All night the Turks had urged on their sick and tired men to the shelter of a position where they hoped to make at least a temporary stand. The Australians, who had marched out before the arrival of supplies, were without rations for themselves or feed for their horses. But, hungry and sleepless as they were, they were very gay as they rode up the old maritime plain on this keen autumn morning. The great barrier, which for seven months had held them so firmly, was now snattered and far behind, and they rejoiced in this open work: they were also keenly interested in the strange country unfolding before them. The dark hills of Judæa, skirting the plain on their right, contained Jerusalem, the great sentimental and moral, if not the religious, goal of every man in the British army. On the west they had through the sand-hills occasional peeps of the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean. And ahead was the Turkish army, their doughty foe of more than two years' bitter fighting at Gallipoli, across Sinai, and



in southern Palestine, now for the first time convincingly beaten and driven fugitive before them. All ranks jested and laughed as, widely scattered, they paced over the billowing plain. The Ayrshire, Inverness, and Somerset Batteries rumbled along, as usual, abreast of the brigades.

Shrapnel and machine-gun fire steadied the advance as the 5th and 7th Regiments moved on Bureir. But nowhere did the enemy stand obstinately, and good progress was made, although casualties were at times numerous, and one enemy shell destroyed half a troop of the 7th Light Horse. Two miles north-west of Bureir the 7th Regiment found two abandoned anti-aircraft guns. All the way the plain was littered with small arms and all kinds of army equipment, which demonstrated the panic and exhaustion of the enemy; the sight of many dead and dying Turks and animals told of the severity of the pursuit and the sickness in the Ottoman ranks. Bureir was entered in the face of shrapnel and machine-gun fire, and two 5-inch howitzers were taken, together with a great quantity of stores and material.

The two regiments were now making the pace a "cracker." The advanced screens, trotting on a wide front, headed for Huleikat, which was passed without halting; the brigade then bore down on Kaukabah, where the screen of the 7th galloped a convoy of 110 waggons and took 390 prisoners, who offered very little resistance. Nevertheless, before the prisoners had all been secured, the Turks began vigorously to shell the village, and continued the gunning for nearly three hours. During this time transport came up with rations, which were at once issued to the hungry troops. Throughout this advance the Australian supply-columns served the rapidly-moving light horsemen in a manner which was the envy of all British troops. So reliable were the supply services of division, brigade, and regiment, that the fighting men had no misgivings when, as on this morning, they moved off at dawn without their rations. They knew that where they went, no matter how fast the pace or rough the track, there would follow the trusty men of the Australian Army Service. "During that diagonal march across the maritime plain," wrote Mr. W. T. Massey, the British official correspondent with Allenby's army in his graphic book *How Jerusalem Was Won*. "I heard infantry

officers remark that the Australians always seemed to have their supplies up with them. I do not think the supplies were always there, but they generally were not far behind, and if resource and energy could work miracles the Australian supply officers deserve the credit for them." But a stronger impelling force than "resource and energy" was behind the Australian supplies. The efficiency of the service was due to the deep admiration and affection in which the supply troops held the light horsemen in the firing line. Theirs was a labour of devotion. They were, moreover, fortunate in having to direct them three officers of singular capacity—Brigadier-General E. F. Trew,⁹ the Deputy-Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, Desert Mounted Corps; Lieutenant-Colonel W. P. Farr,¹⁰ an Australian officer of the same service; and Lieutenant-Colonel Stansfield, the Queensland magician of supply and transport.

So close was the pursuit that at Huleikat, which had been von Kressenstein's headquarters, the hungry light horsemen captured great quantities of fresh brown bread, still hot from the ovens; and scores of them went riding on up the plain, declaring and believing as they ate it that such excellent bread had never been baked before in all the world. Many maps and papers and other office material were seized, but most of the documents of value had been removed by the Germans.

Soon after clearing Kaukabah, a convoy was sighted some miles away, moving in the direction of Kustine. Cameron, with the 5th Regiment and two squadrons of the 7th, galloped off in pursuit. For seven miles the Australians urged on their tired horses, with enemy guns on the front and flanks shelling them as they travelled. They raced, shouting and laughing, through a number of native villages, scattering the startled natives and their sheep and goats and fowls. The rear of the column was overtaken near Suafir, and the chase was continued until near Kustine, where 100 waggons and 300 prisoners were captured, almost without resistance. But Cameron's men were now a spearhead driven deep into the widespread enemy rear-guard, still stiff with artillery and

⁹ Brig.-Gen. E. F. Trew, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c.; R.M.L.I. of Trematon, Havant, Hants., Eng.; b Simon's Town, South Africa, 1 Nov., 1879. Died 8 Sept., 1935.

¹⁰ Lt.-Col. W. P. Farr, D.S.O., p.s.c. A.A. & Q.M.G., Des. Mtd. Corps Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; b Fitzroy, Melb, Vic, 21 Nov., 1889. Died 16 Nov., 1940.

machine-guns. The Turks at once opened fire upon the captured column with shrapnel and high explosive. The Australian horses were spent, the Turkish prisoners were exhausted beyond marching, and orders were given for the 5th Regiment, supported by part of the 7th, to concentrate and remain on the position.

The two regiments now had prisoners in excess of their own numbers, while large bodies of enemy troops surrounded them aggressively on three sides. Soon after dark a body of Turkish infantry about 250 strong moved towards two troops of the 7th under Major T. L. Willsallen.¹¹ The Australians had just lighted their camp-fires when their outposts opened fire upon the Turks. Willsallen dashed forward and shouted in Turkish "You are surrounded!" and the enemy, now at very close quarters, sent forward an officer. After a brief parley the Turks to the number of 230, all with fixed bayonets, surrendered to a light horse party about two score strong.

The incident supplies a good illustration of the demoralisation of the driven enemy at this time. All the prisoners were in a terrible state of distress, many suffering from dysentery, and all from extreme thirst and weariness. Ryrie, in view of his large haul of prisoners and of the exhaustion of his men and horses, decided at dark to withdraw and concentrate his force near Es Suafr el Gharbiye. Four howitzers were captured at Ebdis. These guns were in action as the Australians galloped up to the village, but the swift advance allowed them no chance of escape, and they were surrendered without resistance. During this rattling gallop the 6th Light Horse Regiment moved on the right to cover the flank of the 5th and 7th. Lieutenant Owen Tooth¹² galloped with his troop into Jemah, and captured a gun there. Pushing on, the regiment had a dismounted fire-fight with Turkish infantry south-west of Ebdis, and drove them back into the Wady el Ghueit. Here the enemy stood strongly until Lieutenant F. W. Nivison,¹³ a very capable young machine-gun officer, worked round into a fold of some hills on the left flank, and thence

¹¹ Maj T. L. Willsallen, D.S.O. 7th L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Gunnedah, N.S.W., 9 June, 1879.

¹² Lieut O. W. Tooth, 6th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Bundarra, New England, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 8 Jan., 1890. Killed in action, 3 Dec., 1917.

¹³ Capt F. W. Nivison, M.C. 2nd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Grazier; b. Walcha, N.S.W., 8 Feb., 1884.

shot down forty or fifty with machine-gun and Hotchkiss fire. The enemy then withdrew, badly mauled, and it was this body which afterwards surrendered to Major Willsallen.

The night brought no rest for the light horsemen. Circumstances necessitated a strong and alert outpost line, and every man who could be spared was put to work to water the horses. Except for the drink on the previous night near the Wady Hesi, the animals had not been refreshed since leaving Beer-sheba, and the brigade was threatened with crippling losses. All the little villages on the flanks and rear were exploited for water, but the wells were from 100 to 250 feet deep. With the exception of an occasional antiquated water-wheel, the only appliance for raising the water was a bucket and a rope, and most of the ropes had been removed by the natives. To water 2,000 thirst-stricken horses was, under these conditions, a task exceedingly laborious and slow. All night the crooked little streets of the mud-built, straw-thatched villages were packed with restless, thirsty horses, and gaunt, dusty, unshaven men, careless of their exhaustion in their desire to relieve their animals, and in the buoyancy of the indescribable sense of sweeping victory. Where ropes were missing they were replaced with bridle-reins and telephone wire, and cattle and horses, thus attached to the buckets and walking out in a straight line, hauled the water from depths as great as 200 feet. Mingled with the troops and their horses were crowds of dirty, ragged, picturesque natives, who had been denied their supply during the fight and now, very thirsty, were clamorously fighting for their share. Telephone wire saved the brigade. All night, and until late on the following day, the water was raised bucket by bucket, and the work went on until all the parched horses had been relieved. In the areas where prisoners were assembled the horror of war was seen at its worst. Hundreds of hapless Turks, fighters for a cause for which they knew no enthusiasm and which was even beyond the understanding of men so simple and ignorant, moaned and cried in their sickness and thirst. "Moya! Moya!" (water! water!) sounded all through that hideous night; and the light horsemen, deeply moved by pity for a foe whom they always regarded with respect and even kindness, shared their own scanty supply with the afflicted

prisoners, and worked the night through to bring them a little ease.

Early on the morning of the 10th Ryrie pushed forward reconnaissances towards Beit Durdis and Kustine, where the enemy was discovered in strength. The light horsemen were almost insensible from lack of sleep and excessive action, and only half the horses had been watered. Water, and water only, had again imposed delay. Rations for the men and feed for the horses were still coming forward, although in reduced quantities; but the villages were now yielding quantities of coarse meal, sheep, poultry, and eggs, as well as considerable supplies of horsefeed. Had water been easily obtainable, the brigades could have lived on the country and maintained their pace. But the wells were deep; and that fact meant not only delay, which was fatal to the ambitions of Allenby and Chauvel, but excessive labour, which robbed the men of all sleep and rest. Chaytor had ordered a vigorous resumption of the advance. Ryrie replied that he would push on if it were absolutely necessary, but that the effort would mean the loss of the majority of his horses. No man on the front knew better than Ryrie when his horses had reached breaking-point; Chaytor at once accepted his opinion, and the brigade passed the day about the wells.

While during the 9th Ryrie's brigade, despite its thirsty horses and tired men, was advancing so swiftly on the right, Cox with the 1st Brigade was making good progress on the left. It must have been bitter to the Commander-in-Chief to think that out of his three mounted divisions, the Camel Brigade, and one other brigade of horse, he had only one division available for the pursuit. Always a hard master, on that day he asked much of the veteran Anzac Mounted Division, but he did not ask in vain. Handicapped as they were, the two light horse brigades, with the 7th Mounted Brigade in support, gave him full measure. As long as daylight lasted and their horses could stand, they drove resolutely and recklessly into the rear-guard of the fugitive army. It was from first to last a day on which the work was done by the regimental leaders, the junior officers, and the individual man, rather than by the staff. All through the war the Australian army excelled in its shrewd and audacious junior leadership,

and never more than on this dashing ride up the maritime plain.

Bell with the 3rd Light Horse Regiment led Cox's advance on the left, and entered Bureir without opposition about 9 o'clock. Shortly before 2 o'clock Mejdal was taken with 164 prisoners, chiefly of the medical service, and the brigade pushed northwards. Strong resistance, however, was encountered south of Beit Duras, which was held by a considerable enemy force. Cox therefore swung his brigade towards the coast, and bivouacked on a line south of Esdud. Meanwhile the 52nd Division was continuing its great fighting advance along the beach, and by night had reached Hamame, almost abreast of the light horse. A few hours later the 75th Division arrived at Deir Sineid.

With the Turkish line shattered and the pursuit now well established, the task of the XX Corps was for the time completed. Difficulties of supply prevented the immediate march of more than two infantry divisions up the maritime plain. When in the first phase of the struggle the XX Corps was operating on the flank, its own transport had been supplemented by many thousands of camels and great numbers of wheeled vehicles from the XXI Corps. These were now returned, together with much of the normal transport of the XX, to assist in the maintenance of the 52nd and 75th Divisions, which were engaged along with the mounted troops in the pursuit. The divisions of the XX, and the 54th Division of the XXI, were concentrated in areas where they could be supplied with relatively little haulage. Only by such resourceful arrangements was the victory achieved and exploited.

On the morning of the 10th Cox's brigade moved on Esdud, the ancient Ashdod, and (like Askalon, which the infantry had passed a little further to the south) one of the five cities of the Philistines. The modern Esdud, which stands some distance from the site of the ancient city, is a typical Arab village of the maritime plain—a dirty, crowded place, built of mud and straw. But in old Askalon there are impressive stone relics of the Crusaders, as of still earlier conquerors, who flourished before the British Empire or even the Anglo-Saxon race was born. The 1st Light Horse Regiment, meeting with slight opposition from Turkish cavalry

in the hills north and east of Esdud, secured soon after 10 o'clock the stone bridge, Jisr Esdud, over the Wady Sukereir. About three miles south-east of the village, the 3rd Regiment on the flank discovered the enemy in strength on a line running from Beit Duras, through El Butani el Gharbiye, to the Nahr Sukereir and the coast.

It was now clear that the opposition confronting the Anzac Mounted Division was too stiff to be broken by the mounted troops alone, and that Chaytor must await the arrival of the infantry. During the day the Inverness Battery attached to the 1st Brigade, shooting from a ridge near Esdud, put two 77-mm. enemy guns out of action near Beit Duras; the Austrians were unable to approach with their teams, and both pieces were afterwards captured. At 5.30 the sure British infantry advanced on Beit Duras from the south, beat down the opposition, passed quickly through the village, and seized the commanding ridge to the north of it. At dark the line of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade was taken over by troops of the 75th Division, and the brigade moved in to the coast at Hamame. Here, out of the track of battle, Ryrie's three regiments found abundant spring water only three feet deep in the sand, and the men had the first bath and the only sleep, beyond broken snatches, they had known for more than a fortnight. For three days the men slept, and played in the surf, while the horses rolled in the sand and drank and rested.

On November 9th, while the Anzacs were pushing vigorously northwards, Chauvel's other two divisions were, as we have seen, engaged in watering their horses in the Jemmameh and Nejile areas. That evening the Australian Mounted Division moved north-east against the line Arak el Menshiye-Faluje, while the Yeomanry Division, which was now corps reserve, marched on Hodgson's left rear. The line of march was over very rough country, and the night was intensely dark. But the advance-guard of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade moved surely by the stars, relays of signallers with lamps directing the succeeding brigades. Many of the horses were watered at pools in the Wady Hesi, and at midnight Wilson halted his brigade on the Turkish railway one and a half miles south of Arak el Menshiye. An hour later patrols reported the settlement clear of the enemy, and at

6 o'clock on the morning of the 10th the brigade moved into possession. As they rode across the abandoned German aerodrome, the light horsemen saw the havoc inflicted by the body of airmen who had flown over the brigade at Huj on the evening of the 8th. The hangars were partially wrecked, many enemy dead lay about, and the steel frames of seven burned aeroplanes were seen. Some of these machines had been hit and disabled by British and Australian bombers; others were new machines which had recently arrived on the front. They had only been partly assembled when the evacuation of the aerodrome became imperative, and the Germans had destroyed them to prevent their being captured and used by the British.

Having established a line of outposts to the north and north-east, the brigade spent nearly the whole day in watering the horses. The wells were from 100 to 300 feet deep; the enemy had destroyed the oil engines; and again the water had to be hauled up, a bucket at a time, with telephone wire. All day the enemy shelled the locality from the direction of Zeita, a few miles to the north-east, and, as usual in this advance, paid particular attention to the wells. Reconnaissance disclosed substantial enemy strength close ahead, especially about two miles south of Zeita. Hodgson decided to strike at the enemy at Summeil, a few miles to the north of El Faluje. The 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade was to open the attack from the south-west; as Grant's assault developed, Wilson was to close up on his right, with the 5th Mounted Brigade covering the gap between the two Australian brigades, while Barrow's Yeomanry Division was to be in close general support. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon the 4th Brigade was advancing on the enemy position, which was held by about two battalions of infantry and two guns, while Wilson's 3rd Brigade, with its centre on the railway, was moving up from the south. Scott with the 9th Regiment was to lead the attack for the 3rd Brigade, with the 8th in support.

The attack did not develop, and there was afterwards considerable discussion concerning the failure to close on the position in accordance with orders. Scott advanced in line of troop columns to within 1,000 yards of the Turkish infantry, and there halted. "Every endeavour," reported Scott after-

wards, "was made to gain touch with the 4th Light Horse Brigade, but without success. A commanding officers' conference was therefore held at 9th Regimental Headquarters, Brigadier-General P. J. V. Kelly¹⁴ and Lord Apsley represented the 5th Mounted Brigade. The commanding officers, seconds-in-command, and squadron leaders of the 8th and 9th regiments were present. At 6.30 touch was gained with two squadrons of the 4th Light Horse Regiment (of the 4th Brigade) who were unable to gain touch with the remainder of their brigade. It was now decided, owing to failing to link up with the 4th Brigade, to abandon the attack and withdraw 1,000 yards and hold an outpost line for the night, which was done."

The 4th Light Horse Brigade had occupied Faluje as the 3rd entered Arak el Menshiye, and then discovered, as was usual in the villages, a number of Turks in hiding. These dispirited stragglers concealed themselves as their units fled, preferring to trust themselves to the doubtful mercy of the Arabs or to fall prisoners to the British, rather than take further part in the distressing retreat. Moving to the attack on Summeil from the south-west, Grant's regiments were confronted by 3,000 yards of exposed low plain dominated by the enemy from high ground. Shell and machine-gun fire necessitated a long dismounted march, and the advance was slow. The 11th Regiment on the left made touch with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Beit Affe, but by dark the objective at Summeil was still beyond striking distance. The line was then halted and held for the night. Had Scott pushed up from the south, the Turks might have abandoned their position and retired, as they did during the night, to a line further north.

Favoured by the rough foot-hills, the Turks now showed signs of determination to resist further inroads on their left flank. They had a rough rear-guard line, stiffened with light, hastily-dug earthworks, across the Philistine plain from about Summeil and Zeita in the Shephelah through Burka to the mouth of the Wady Sukereir on the east. It was evident that, if this line could be even temporarily maintained, it would

¹⁴ Brig.-Gen. P. J. V. Kelly, C.M.G., D.S.O. Officer of British Regular Army; of Castle Connell, Co. Limerick, Ireland; b. Rangoon, Burma, 1 Sept., 1877.

prevent Allenby from using his mounted divisions to their full advantage, and would also give the enemy a chance of maintaining his lateral communications between Ludd and Jerusalem.

The Turks still had possession of the whole of the Judæan range from a point a few miles north of Beersheba. Allenby's communications, therefore, as the British force moved north, were in a sense open to a raid from the east. But the shattering blow the enemy had already received, and his need for a concentration of his retiring forces in front of the British divisions on the maritime plain, made the danger from the flank very small. The Turks were in no condition for an effective counter-stroke; the best they could hope was to steady and collect their hard-driven army, and endeavour to check Allenby before he secured positions which would be fatal to the safety of Jerusalem. With this in view, they sought to deny further progress to the British right, believing that if this could be done the advance on the restricted coastal sector must soon come to a standstill.

The Australian Mounted Division, after the occupation of Summeil at dawn on the 11th, was unable to advance in the face of gathering opposition from the immediate north-east. It had been intended that the Yeomanry Division should attack Zeita on the right simultaneously with the early morning advance of the Australians on Summeil; but this order was cancelled during the night, and Barrow was instructed by Chauvel to move with all speed towards the coast and take over the sector on which Anzac Mounted Division was then operating. It was after dark when this order was received, and, as Barrow's brigades were dispersed over an extended area, the transfer from flank to flank took much longer than the Corps commander anticipated. The lay mind, in considering operations, is apt to exaggerate the speed at which mounted divisions and brigades can be swung from one part of the field to another. To assemble a scattered division in the dark, to form it into a column for the march, and to lead it surely over rough, unknown country, is inevitably a slow and ticklish operation. Orders have to be drafted and sent from division to brigade, from brigade to regiment, and on to squadrons and troops; and some hours at least must

elapse before the 7,500 horses of the division, with their artillery and great train of supply and munition transport, are on the move. No part of warfare calls for more resolution, more discipline, more perfection in organisation, than the sustained and vigorous pursuit of a beaten army.

With the withdrawal of the Yeomanry Division, Hodgson was compelled at once to cancel orders which had been given for a strong fighting advance on the morning of the 11th. In concentrating the two divisions of Desert Mounted Corps on this Shephelah flank, Chauvel had hoped for an advance as rapid as that which had been made by Anzac Mounted Division on the left. But he was quick to recognise that, with the stiff resistance which offered, and the broken, hilly country, the divisions were offered very little opportunity for rapid mounted work. Frankly admitting the miscalculation, he therefore marched Barrow across to the more elastic front on the other side, where the rolling plains might give the sword-carrying yeomanry an opening for cavalry operations. Up to this time the Yeomanry Division had been denied any really active work since the fighting had begun a fortnight before, and Barrow and his officers were chafing at their continued ill-fortune.

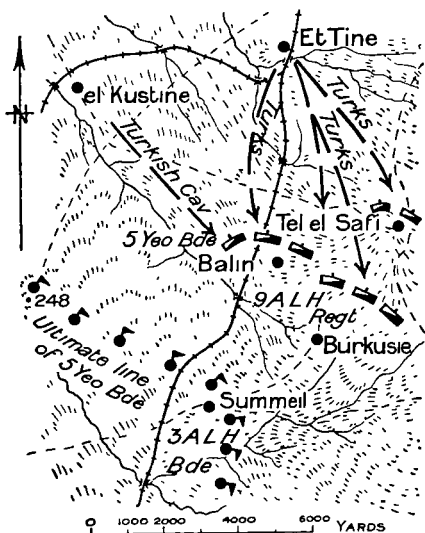
Hodgson's orders were now to act as a detached force in watching the enemy's south-eastern force. Unless the Turks withdrew, his three brigades were not to attempt any advance, but were to demonstrate as strongly as possible with light mounted patrols, which were supported by most of the division, dismounted and standing by to resist any attempt to counter-attack. This activity was calculated to attract attention from the line further north-west, where it was hoped that the Yeomanry Division, the Anzacs, and the infantry would succeed in penetrating the line of resistance which the enemy was now attempting to organise. Water trouble, again very acute, necessitated the temporary dismounting of most of Hodgson's men; so deep were the wells, and so limited the supply of water, that seventeen hours were spent in satisfying the thirst of the horses of a single regiment. "The water question," says a note in the divisional diary at this time, "is extremely serious, and horses are falling away rapidly in strength and condition."

Patrols found the enemy in entrenchments three miles east and north-east of Summeil. While the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade held the gap to the left between Summeil and the right flank of the Anzacs, two of the Royal Horse Artillery batteries shelled the enemy towards Burkusie on the east. Movement of strong enemy infantry forces eastwards showed that the demonstration was serving its purpose, that the Turks exaggerated the British force on the flank, and that they were ignorant of the strong concentration of mounted troops taking place towards the coast, where, in addition to the Yeomanry Division, the Camel Brigade and the New Zealand Brigade were now in position. On the night of the 11th the 5th Mounted Brigade was holding the right flank, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade was between Arak el Menshiye and Summeil, and the 4th was extended thence to the north-east. At dawn on the following morning the 5th Mounted Brigade moved on Balin, and the 3rd Light Horse Brigade reconnoitred Burkusie; if the enemy was occupying the Balin-Burkusie line, he was to be pressed vigorously. The yeomanry reached Balin without opposition, and a squadron of the 9th Light Horse Regiment seized Burkusie and Tel el Safi, the site of ancient Gath, while the 8th Light Horse Regiment kept watch for enemy reinforcements from the direction of Beit Jibrin, to the east of Zeita.

The morning passed quietly, but soon after noon there was evidence of considerable enemy activity before Balin. Some 6,000 Turks were reported by airmen to be advancing south from Et Tine, and enemy cavalry was showing up west of Balin. Troop trains were unloading enemy infantry on the railway north of Balin. An attack upon the yeomanry was imminent. Hodgson therefore ordered the yeomanry to hold Balin, while Wilson was to send one regiment to their support. But as the Turks, in greatly superior numbers and supported by many batteries, moved to the assault on Balin, they also fell in considerable strength on the squadron of the 9th Light Horse on Burkusie Ridge. The position there at once became critical, and Wilson was compelled to rush two squadrons of the 8th Light Horse Regiment up in support, so that only the third squadron of the Victorians could be sent to the yeomanry. The Turks, favoured by the ground

until they came to close quarters, advanced boldly in successive waves, and the line held on the Burkusie Ridge was therefore withdrawn slightly to better ground. In this retirement Sergeant James Bowman,¹⁵ of the 8th, went out alone under heavy fire at close range and carried in a wounded man. Meanwhile the yeomanry were being heavily pressed, and at about 3 o'clock, after a bitter fire-fight, were obliged to retire from their ground at Balin. At 3.30 the reserve squadron of the 9th was rushed up to reinforce the slight body which was holding Burkusie Ridge, and the 10th Regiment was brought at the gallop from Faluje (where the horses had been watering) and sent to the same position. A troop which had been holding Tel el Safi was withdrawn.

The enemy now concentrated his gun-fire upon the Burkusie Ridge, and, with the retirement of the yeomanry from Balin, about 4,000 enemy infantry pressed down on either side of the railway, and swung a large body to assault Burkusie from the west. Attacked in front, and now on their left flank—which was exposed by the withdrawal of the yeomanry—the Australians, after inflicting heavy losses on the enemy with machine and Hotchkiss guns, were forced to yield the ridge. At the same time the enemy thrust heavily at the line held by the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade further west. On the left, where the 11th Regiment had its flank exposed, the Turks, supported by six machine-guns and high explosive,



¹⁵ Lieut. W. N. J. Bowman, D.C.M. 8th L.H. Regt. Horsebreaker; b. Grasmere, Warrnambool, Vic., 1892.

came within 200 yards of the Australian line. But the Queenslanders, shooting with calm precision, stood fast, and held them until Lieutenant J. S. Robinson¹⁶ dashed up with two machine-guns, when the attack was quickly broken. Meanwhile Hodgson's batteries had been obliged to fall back to cover a line taken up by the 5th Mounted Brigade, and running from Summeil to Point 248. Here the yeomanry, with the 4th Light Horse Brigade on their left, were joined by detachments of light horse from the 3rd Brigade, and the attack was definitely stopped. At 5 o'clock Hodgson was told that the 75th Infantry Division had reached Es Suafr and was, if necessary, ready to support his left. But the Turks, either discouraged by the resistance they had met, or satisfied with having driven the Australians and yeomanry from Balin and Burkusie, remained on the ground they had won, and the night passed quietly. During the day the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade on the left was in touch with Anzac Mounted Division, which had its right flank about four miles north-west of Point 248.

On the morning of November 13th Burkusie Ridge was still strongly occupied by the enemy. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade held the line Arak el Menshiye-Summeil, with the 5th Mounted Brigade in support. A renewal of the attack was expected; but the Turks, after being shelled for some time by the Notts Battery, withdrew from the position soon after noon and retreated towards the north. Wilson was ordered to push forward his line to Sherkiyeh, while the 4th Light Horse Brigade and the 5th Mounted Brigade endeavoured to advance on the left. Wilson occupied a line from Point 248 to Sherkiyeh shortly before dark, but the horses of the 4th Light Horse Brigade and the 5th Mounted were too distressed for action, and their orders to attack were cancelled.

Early on the morning of the 14th Wilson marched with his brigade (less the 10th Regiment, which followed on the following morning) for a few days' rest on the beach near the mouth of the Wady Sukereir. Both men and horses sorely needed a spell. When the 10th arrived on the morning of the 15th the saddles had been on the horses for forty-eight hours.

¹⁶ Lieut. J. S. Robinson, M.C., 4th Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Planter; b. Norfolk Island, N.S.W., 4 Jan., 1888.

and during that time the regiment had not been watered. The men of the brigade had their first wash since October 28th. Sheep and fresh coarse bread were bought from the natives, and the troops enjoyed the temporary relief from biscuits and tinned beef. Horse-mastership had now reached a high pitch of perfection among the Australians, and, although the horses were low in condition, very few of them were suffering from sore backs.

CHAPTER XXVII

CLEARING THE MARITIME PLAIN

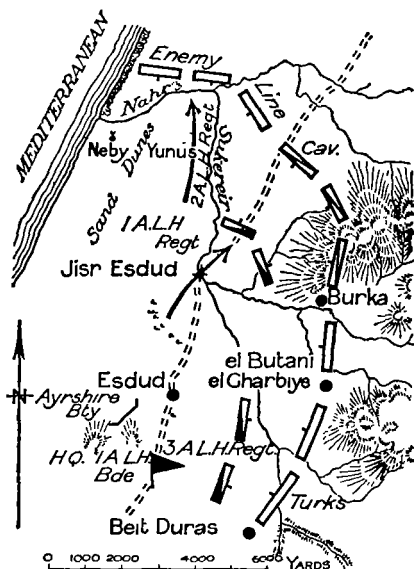
By the evening of the 10th, when the 156th Brigade of the 52nd Division, after marching fourteen miles—much of it over heavy sand and in a violent khamsin—had gallantly cleared the ridge north of Beit Duras, the infantry was almost abreast of the mounted troops. This was due in part to the fine marching and fighting abilities of the 52nd and 75th Divisions, but in the main to the lack of water, which was crippling Chauvel's horsemen. A mounted division requires at least three times as much water in the field as a division of infantry. In the early stages of the pursuit surprise was expressed that the enemy had neglected to destroy all the wells as he retreated up the plain. In some measure this was due to the disorganisation, and at times the panic, which prevailed in the Turkish forces. But the chief reason for the apparent neglect was the enemy's fear of antagonising the natives; the Turks and Germans also believed that the depth of the wells, and the scanty supplies they contained, would delay the pursuit sufficiently to enable them to escape. This belief was well founded.

Cox, with the 1st Light Horse Brigade, advanced from the Esdud area on the morning of the 11th in an endeavour to secure the Wady Sukereir between the sea and the stone bridge north-east of the village. The importance of possessing the mouth of the wady was twofold. Reconnaissance by the 1st Light Horse Regiment had discovered a fine sheet of fresh water, ten feet deep and thirty yards wide, extending from Tel el Murre almost to the coast. Further, the locality promised an ideal camping-ground for mounted brigades, and the beach south of the wady was also suitable for landing supplies. No such expanse of fresh water had gladdened the eyes of the Australians since they had left Egypt, and on the following morning they rode forward with zest to drive the Turks from the high ground beyond it.

While the screen of the 2nd Regiment advanced towards the bridge, the 1st moved on the right, and, making touch with

the infantry marching on Burka, established a strong firing line in the Wady el Khubb. Here they were heavily shelled and suffered many casualties, including Captain E. S. Kater¹ and Lieutenant F. H. Otton,² who were wounded. Meanwhile, on their left the screen of the 2nd succeeded in crossing the stone bridge; but the enemy gunners had the crossing registered, and with sustained and accurate fire denied it to the rest of the regiment. Bourne then directed his troops along the west bank to a point near Neby Yunis, where they crossed under considerable fire from Turks placed on the sand-hills between Tel el Murre and Khurbet Sukereir. The Australians, however, were now extraordinarily clever in making all possible use of cover, and in a close rifle-fight of this kind were more than a match for their keen-sighted and resourceful foe. Moving cautiously, they steadily forced the enemy from his high ground, and before nightfall held Tel el Murre, and had put an outpost line over the wady from the coast to the bridge. An extensive bridgehead was then established at Jisir Esdud, and the line was continued by Granville's men towards Burka.

On the morning of the 12th, the 156th Infantry Brigade moved to an assault on Burka, with the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Regiments co-operating on their left. At Burka the Turks had two well-dug lines of trenches, less than a mile apart, and the Lowlanders had before them a plain frontal



¹ Capt. E. S. Kater, M.C. Adjutant, 1st L.H. Regt., 1917. *Grazier*; b. Warren, N.S.W., 5 March, 1890.

² Capt. F. H. Otton, 1st L.H. Regt. *Farmer and grazier*; b. Numerella, Bega, N.S.W., 29 July, 1880.

attack over naked country. The Australians took no part in the actual advance, but did useful work on the left flank, where the 1st Light Horse Regiment, with four machine-guns and the 2nd Regiment in support, took up a line from which they were able to enfilade the Turkish trenches as the Scots advanced. Once more the light horsemen were able to witness the admirable steadiness and dash of the men of the 52nd. Marching with only light artillery support, the Lowlanders stormed the first trench-line with the bayonet, crossed a hollow, and dashed up a long slope at the second; a sense of superiority which made them irresistible aided them rapidly to clear the position. But the Turks, recognising that, if this blow at Burka was exploited by the British, their new line of resistance, which now rested its right flank on Beshshit a few miles to the north, was irretrievably broken, returned that night in a counter-attack. They succeeded in sweeping the Scots from one high knoll on the right, but were quickly driven off again; the way was then clear for a further British advance north-east towards Katra.

With the fall of Burka the enemy lost his last chance of saving his Ramleh-Jerusalem communications. Allenby now had the full strength of the 52nd and 75th Infantry Divisions close up to his advanced line. With the exception of the 3rd Light Horse and the 7th Mounted Brigades, which were to be given a temporary rest, he had all his mounted troops, including the New Zealand Brigade and the Camel Brigade, forward and still fit for vigorous fighting. The situation as to water was likely to improve towards the north. The enemy, in his endeavour to save his left flank, had swung some thousands of his best infantry across on the exhausting mission against the Australian Mounted Division round Summeil, and, with the British leader ready to strike strongly on the west, had stumbled into another unfortunate miscalculation. At the same time, in fairness to the Turkish High Command, it should be remembered that by this time the enemy troops had fallen very low in fighting quality. Suffering from a sense of their overthrow all along the line from Gaza to Beersheba, they were physically spent; they had marched the soles off their boots; they were ill-fed; they had suffered heavy losses, and dysentery was increasingly prevalent in their ranks.

Allenby's troops were physically tired, but were buoyed up with their victories to a superhuman pitch of effectiveness; their health was good; their supplies, if somewhat short and irregular, were, with what they bought from the natives, sufficient to keep them going.

Such morale as remained to the Turks was also receiving rude shocks from the British air force. Following the great raid on the aerodrome at Menshiye on the evening of the 8th, twenty-two machines had on the 9th raided the aerodrome at Et Tine, and left the place in flames and ruins. On the same day sixteen machines had bombed Julis; and every day for a fortnight British and Australian airmen had bombed and machine-gunned similar positions and constantly harassed the already nerve-racked enemy troops.

On the afternoon of the 12th, while the 156th Brigade was carrying enemy trenches at Burka, the 155th Brigade on its right advanced almost without opposition to a point some eight miles north-east of Esdud, and on that night occupied a line in advance of the mounted troops. On the previous day the country now covered by the infantry had been strongly held, and this march served to prove that the enemy had definitely abandoned his Et Tine-Beshshit line. On the 13th, while the 52nd Division continued its progress to the north, Bulfin (who, with Chauvel, was responsible for the conduct of the advance), for fear the British front should become too narrow, wheeled the 75th Division to the north-east towards the important railway centre at Junction Station, where the Jaffa-Jerusalem line was joined by the main Turkish line which served southern Palestine. The Commander-in-Chief had hoped that Chauvel's horsemen would by November 9th have reached both Et Tine and Junction Station, but difficulties in regard to water had balked the execution of his plan. He was now advancing slowly, and in a large measure with infantry, over ground which he had hoped to cover with horsemen at the trot. When the time came to fight for the Holy City, a dear price was to be paid for the inevitable delay.

In the advance of November 13th, the Yeomanry Division, with a battalion of the Camel Brigade on its left, advanced briskly on Yebna (the Ibelin of the Crusaders) and entered the village at 11 o'clock without opposition. Chaytor, with the

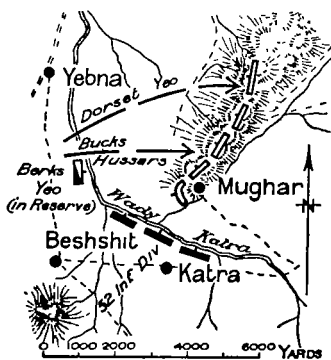
New Zealand Brigade and the 1st Light Horse Brigade, followed in support, and, as the yeomanry swung to the right to assist the infantry in their attack round Katra, the Anzacs moved into the gap left by this movement between the yeomanry and the sea. With a detachment of the Camel Brigade on his left, Chaytor continued his advance in the coastal sector as far as the mouth of the Wady Rubin.

The rapid advance of Cox's brigade on the 11th had prevented the enemy from securing his right flank on the Wady Sukereir. He had then intended to stand along the great Wady es Surar, which, when close to the coast, drains into the Wady Rubin; but again the pursuing horsemen were too quick for him. The thrusting of Chaytor and Barrow on the British left flank caused his line to be bent back until it rested on commanding ground occupied by the villages Katra and El Mughar. He had his main strength concentrated about Katra and Junction Station, while his left flank was thrust forward to guard the old route which leads up by the Wady Sunt to Bethlehem. Katra lay south of the Surar, on a long mound; its defenders were sheltered by a thicket of little cactus-enclosed fields like those around Gaza, and their fire swept the slopes leading up from the plain on the south. Slightly north of the native mud-built village is a trim little Jewish settlement which, with its well-kept orchards and white, red-tiled houses, afforded the first glimpse of Western civilisation seen by the British troops during the campaign. Across the Wady Surar lay the village of El Mughar, in a high situation on the southern slope of a group of hills running to the north. While the 75th Division on the right was marching on Mesmiyeh, astride the road leading diagonally across the plain from Deir Sineid to Junction Station, the 52nd Division on the left advanced against the strong positions round Katra and Mughar. The attack on Katra was entrusted to the 155th Brigade, and was preceded by a vigorous bombardment of the village and its rear by the combined artillery of the two infantry divisions. But the Turks, secure in the cactus, held on tenaciously, and the Lowlanders for some time made but little headway. Then Brigadier-General J. B. Pollok-McCall, carrying a rifle and charging at the head of his men, stormed the village with the bayonet, and slowly fought the enemy out

of the fields and gardens. The Turks suffered heavily, no less than 400 being killed by machine-gun fire in a single field.

The infantry then endeavoured to cross the Wady Surar and the broken intricate ground which flanked the big water-course, and so to clear Mughar. The Turks, however, had a number of machine-guns in a plantation surrounded by cactus hedges south of the village, and thus baffled the British advance. At this time the Yeomanry Division was west and north-west of Mughar, and General Barrow was asked by General Hill, commanding the 52nd Division, to co-operate with his endeavour. Barrow agreed. The task was given to Brigadier-General C. A. C. Godwin, of the 6th Mounted Brigade, a forceful and skilful leader of horse, who afterwards acted as chief of staff to Chauvel in the grand final ride to Damascus and Aleppo. The brigade, which was made up of regiments of the Bucks Hussars and Berks and Dorset Yeomanry, was smuggled forward in small parties into the Wady Surar. Godwin then boldly decided to gallop the Turkish position. The Dorsets were to ride for a hill a few hundred yards behind the village, and the Bucks Hussars for a ridge which ran between this hill and Mughar, while the Berks were held in reserve.

As the two regiments climbed up the steep bank and cleared the wady, they were about 3,000 yards from their objectives, and their advance lay first across the level plain and then up exposed slopes to the enemy positions. The brigade's battery and clever overhead machine-gun fire gave them some protection as they trotted forward. The Bucks continued at the trot until within almost 1,000 yards of the position, and then, giving their horses rein, charged at the gallop. Heavy machine-gun fire swept the line of horsemen as they rode shouting up the slope, and many saddles were emptied. But the yeomanry galloped finely to the crest, and the Turks on their immediate front threw down their



arms and surrendered. On the flanks, however, the enemy began at once to pour in heavy fire at close range, and for a few minutes the situation was critical. Captured enemy machine-guns were then turned on those firing from Mughar on the right; two squadrons of the Berks were brought up, went in dismounted, and cleared up the village. On the left the Dorsets had attempted to dismount as they reached the high ground, and came under very heavy machine-gun fire, which cut down many of their horses. But the enemy was completely broken; his losses in killed and wounded were severe, and the yeomanry captured nearly 1,100 prisoners, two field-guns, and eighteen machine-guns. The yeomanry lost one officer and fifteen other ranks killed, six officers and 106 other ranks wounded, while 265 horses were killed or wounded. This dashing charge, like the mounted assaults on Huj and Beersheba, again demonstrated that, given ground on which strong pace can be maintained, cavalry has lost none of its old terror to infantry in position, even though supported with machine-gun fire. While the horses were at the gallop in extended order and the range was rapidly changing, the yeomanry's losses were slight. The casualties to the Dorsets, when the decision was taken to dismount, were very much heavier than that suffered by the Bucks in pushing their charge right home.

The fall of Katra and Mughar cleared the way for a strong advance by the 52nd Division, while on the right the 75th stormed Mesmiyeh and opened the way to Junction Station. As the infantry advanced on Mesmiyeh, Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Parsons,^a of the 11th Light Horse Regiment, was ordered to co-operate vigorously on their right. The regiment moved with dash, and with six machine-guns reached a dominating position on the infantry's right front; from this the Australians were able to bring a harassing enfilade to play upon the Turks, who retired after offering very little opposition. On the following morning (November 14th) two armoured cars, travelling in advance of the 234th Brigade, seized Junction Station, and made the valuable capture of two railway engines and forty-five trucks. So far

^a Col. J. W. Parsons, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 11th L.H. Regt., 1917, 1918/19. Farmer and grazier; of Yankalilla, S. Aust.; b. Victor Harbour, S. Aust., 12 Oct., 1878.

in the campaign the armoured cars had been favoured with very little opportunity for effective action; but here they came upon a body of Turks at close range, and caused about 100 casualties. At Junction Station the wells were 150 feet deep, and watering with canvas buckets and telephone wire was again very slow. The pumps carried by the engineers had during the advance proved inadequate to lift the water from the depths at which it was found, and the troopers had to do the work for themselves. Regiments which picked up oil-drums at the Turkish dumps counted themselves very lucky, and in subsequent operations always carried drums and ropes with them on pack-horses.

The enemy's railway communication with Jerusalem was now severed, and the British troops were also within easy striking distance of the main road from Jaffa into Judæa. The Holy City, a magnetic lure to every mind in Allenby's army, seemed close at hand. All eyes were turned to the dark hills in the east, and, as folds in the successive hills disclosed one grey stone-built village after another, men declared that they had looked upon the buildings of Jerusalem.

On the morning of the 14th the 12th Light Horse Regiment entered Et Tine without fighting, and found a considerable supply of stores and water for the horses. Before evacuation the enemy had fired the station buildings, dumps, some motor lorries, and a number of aeroplanes, which were in flames as the Australians entered. Ryrrie's 2nd Brigade, after its rest on the beach, temporarily joined the Australian Mounted Division in place of the 3rd. At noon Grant's brigade was holding Kezaze; but the enemy was still strong in the hills on the right, and a counter-attack against the British flank being feared, the 12th Regiment was placed in a position of observation at El Dhenebbe and the 4th on the line Jilia-Kezaze-Khulde, with the 7th Mounted Brigade operating in the same locality. The main Turkish force on this flank was now steadily retreating towards the north-east. Further to the west the 52nd Division had captured Mansura, and the yeomanry had pushed into Akir and Naane and blown up a mile of the Jerusalem railway near Mansura. The infantry, steadily swinging to the east, were now definitely turning their faces towards the passes leading up to Jerusalem,

while the bulk of the mounted troops crossed over to the west and carried on the advance up the maritime plain. History was to repeat itself. In all the wars of the ancients, and also during the Crusades, chariots and horsemen fought on the rolling plain on the west, and on the level surface of Esdraelon between Galilee and Samaria, while the infantry battled in the rough highlands. So in Allenby's campaign Jerusalem was to fall to the sterling infantrymen, and not to the light horse, New Zealanders, or yeomanry. The New Zealanders, like the yeomanry of Barrow's division, had been held up on the Beersheba flank. Not until November 14th did the brigade play any important part in the great ride up the plain; but, when their chance came, they thrilled the widely scattered British army with the quality of their achievement. On the morning of the 14th Chaytor continued his march from the Nahr Rubin towards the north, with his left flank guarded by a small detachment of the Camel Brigade, which moved along the beach. The 1st Light Horse Brigade on the right rode for the town of Ramleh, the New Zealanders, under Meldrum, towards the port of Jaffa. Shortly before 10 o'clock Cox's advance-guards entered the Jewish village of Khurbet Deiran, a pleasant settlement with a wide expanse of olive- and orange-groves, orchards, and vineyards, immediately north of it. Here the Australians found an abundant supply of excellent water with pumping-gear intact. The Turks had withdrawn from the pretty village itself, but remained in orchards beyond, where cactus hedges gave them good shelter. Their object was apparently to delay pursuit, so as to ensure the escape of considerable columns of transport which could be seen farther to the north; and, despite vigorous shelling by Cox's battery, they held their ground, sniping the Australians as they watered their horses. The orchards, which begin at Deiran, extend west and north-west over a group of low sand-hills through the settlement of Wady Hanein to the larger settlement of Richon le Zion, a total distance of about eight miles.

As Cox's brigade entered Deiran, the New Zealanders on the left closed on Wady Hanein, and further to the west advanced towards Richon. No opposition was met until Wady Hanein was reached, but the 1st Light Horse Brigade reported columns of troops crossing their front towards the

New Zealand sector. Soon after midday Meldrum's brigade advanced strongly, with the Canterbury Regiment on the right, the Wellingtons in the centre, and the Aucklands on the left, and soon located a stoutly-held enemy line running across the sand-hills. Machine-gun and rifle fire for a time obstructed the advance in the centre, but the Wellingtons, with a dashing bayonet attack, in which twenty Turks were killed and two machine-guns captured, drove through the resistance. The Aucklands on the left were then held up by a strong body of infantry, which was being rapidly reinforced, and the regiment came under fire from a battery towards Richon. At 2.30 the Turks opened heavy fire from all arms upon the Aucklands, and a quarter of an hour later a force of 1,500 advanced to the attack.

The New Zealanders, lying down in the open, shot rapidly and accurately; but they were few and scattered, and the Turks, favoured in their approach by cover from the little sand-hills, closed quickly and in overwhelming numbers on the Auckland position. Lieutenant-Colonel J. N. McCarroll,⁴ the commanding officer, reported the situation serious and asked for reinforcements; but only one squadron of Wellingtons was available. For some time a hot duel was waged at close quarters by the rival machine-gunners, but at 4 o'clock the Turks, who were now very close to the New Zealanders, dashed forward with the bayonet and hand-grenades. McCarroll had all his men, including batmen and gallopers, in the firing line. The shouting enemy got within fifty yards of the riflemen; then the Aucklands, who had taken severe punishment with absolute steadiness, rose and met the Turks with the bayonet. The Turks had the numbers, but they were no match with the steel for the powerful young New Zealand farmers. As the two lines closed, the fighting was bloody, but brief; then the Turks broke and fled, leaving 162 dead and a large number of wounded on the ground. The New Zealanders had one officer and twenty other ranks killed, and nine officers and seventy-eight other ranks wounded.

This counter-attack was the last effort made by the enemy to save his Jaffa-Ramleh-Jerusalem communications. With

⁴ Lt.-Col J. N. McCarroll, C.M.G., D.S.O. Auckland Mtd. Rifles. Farmer; of Whangarei, Auckland District, N.Z.; b. Belfast, Ireland, 13 May, 1873.

the loss of Junction Station, in the east, the advance of the yeomanry in the centre, and the failure of his spasmodic assault near Richon, his whole line was in retreat by the evening of the 14th. Next morning the patrols of the Anzac Mounted Division reported the front all clear, and the advance was at once vigorously resumed. The 1st Light Horse Brigade, the 2nd Regiment under Bourne leading, moved through olive-groves and gardens on Ramleh, found it evacuated, and entered the town about 11 o'clock. The Australians rode that day with very light hearts. Within the past fortnight the campaign had taken on an entirely new aspect. After their long summer sojourn in strong winds and heavy dust on the bare plains of southern Palestine, all ranks had rejoiced as they urged their jaded horses over the rich, rolling expanse of the maritime plain. The landscape at that time was bare of vegetation, but the Australian countryman recognised the capacity of the dark, fertile soil. His knowledge of similar tracts at home told him that, with rainfall, this region into which he had broken would yield sweet pastures and heavy crops; and he found interest in the succession of native villages, which, squalid and verminous as they were, were thronged with men and women and bright-eyed, impudent little children. These villages, despite their poverty, and the degree to which they had been drawn upon by the enemy, yielded a very welcome addition to the scanty supplies of the mounted brigades. The natives were at first shy, and fearful of losing all their foodstuffs. Their flocks of sheep and goats and their little cattle were concealed in the mud houses, and their grain and tibbin (the rough straw from which the grain had been threshed) were cleverly hidden in cisterns and buildings. The sheikhs, accustomed to the value of Turkish paper, were suspicious of British requisition orders, and for a time held out for payment in gold or silver. But the resource and insistence of the requisitioning officers of the light horse brigades usually prevailed, and—supported by the average Australian trooper's capability for satisfying the needs of himself and his beloved horse—resulted in making the conditions of living tolerable all over the plain. Eventually the natives of Palestine, like the natives of every country occupied by the British during the war, grew rich out

of the occupation. Occasionally, perhaps, an individual flock-owner suffered temporary injustice, but always, on his appeal, the compensation was sure and generous.

The Arab villages, therefore, were a boon to the men and their horses. But their rough and narrow fare was forgotten in the good things provided by the Jewish settlements of Deiran, Wady Hanein, and Richon. The Arabs had greeted the British horsemen with ready cheers, just as their forefathers greeted all the winning armies which in every age have marched and fought up and down their unhappy battle-highway. But the Jews and their pretty and orderly settlements offered a much fairer prospect. The lot of these people during the war had been unfortunate in the extreme. Made up chiefly of immigrants from South Russia, with occasional Jewish families from Roumania, Spain, and even the British Empire and America, they were a simple, God-fearing folk, ill-fitted for physical conflict. Since they had come to Palestine under the generous scheme founded and fostered by the Rothschilds and other Jewish millionaires, they had carried on a brave and ceaseless struggle against the thieving Arabs, who, resentful of their coming, and careless of the lax Turkish law, had harassed and pillaged them without scruple. Then, after a long struggle, when their increasing numbers and wealth and power were making them safe against the natives, there had come, first the crusade of the Young Turks against all who were not Turks, and after that the war.

To the timid mind of the Jewish settlers these two calamities spelled ruin, and even extermination. They possessed neither the strength to fight in their defence nor the money to purchase their safety. But they had on their side one factor which was of paramount influence in all the world at that time. They were the foster-children, the special care and pride, of great international Jewish financiers. The Turks might not have cared whether they offended all-powerful Semitic bankers, but Germany and Austria would not be guilty of such a blunder. And so, while other non-Turks, and especially the non-Moslems of the Turkish Empire, suffered so sorely at that time, these defenceless Jewish colonies were subjected to no measures of extreme cruelty. They were, it is true, stripped by the Turks, without compensation, of their

horses and vehicles, and the barbed-wire was taken from their fences. They were treated with increased insolence and unscrupulousness by the Arabs, who, during the war, were freed from any slight restraint that might previously have been imposed upon their dishonesty by the Turkish Government. But their houses were safe, and their women were respected. The long arm of the Jewish money-lender was their efficient bulwark.

Nevertheless, they had for three years lived in a tremulous state of alarm, and had been reduced to a low level of poverty. The excited hopes stirred in their breasts by the news of the first British appearance before Gaza had been dashed by exaggerated enemy stories of the disastrous reverse Murray had suffered on April 19th; and all through the summer Turks and Germans had boasted of the strength of their Gaza-Beersheba line, and of the impotence of the British army. Then came the great assault at the end of October; and soon the fugitive Turkish soldiers confirmed the news, at first incredible, of Allenby's triumph. All through the war the men, despite the continued safety they enjoyed but could not understand, had kept their young women and girls confined in their houses. They had for a long time been without such foodstuffs as tea and sugar. They had wrestled, till the foundations of their faith were shaken, in prayer for British victory, which promised them not only temporary personal relief, but permanent freedom from the yoke of the Turkish Government and the cruelty of the Arabs, and the enduring possession of the Judæa of their fathers, the cradle of their religion and their race. The welcome which they therefore gave to the light horsemen of the 1st Brigade on the morning of November 15th was demonstrative and sincere. Regardless of desultory enemy shell-fire, they crowded around the Australians, shouting and laughing and crying, hailing them as true deliverers. Nor was the emotion all on their side. These polyglot Jews of Deiran and Wady Hanein were the first communities of white European people, wearing European dress and living a Western life, whom many Australians and New Zealanders had known since they left home at the outset of the war three years before. English was little spoken in the villages; but a common language was

scarcely necessary to bring together eager Jews and lonely horsemen, and there began at once an association, often marked by affection, which was only broken by the close of the war.

The Jewish settlements contained large supplies of various fruits and wines, while bread, even at the outset, was to be obtained at a price not beyond the pockets of the well-paid Australians. Already by the middle of November the oranges of the famous groves, extending from Deiran towards Jaffa and beyond, were flushed with gold, and were eaten greedily by the men. Wine gladdened the heart of every worn trooper who was lucky enough to obtain it; and even the sense of straight-planted streets, the little white houses with their red roofs and gay gardens, and the wide, rolling orchards and vineyards along the sand-hills, were an unfeigned delight to these simple, veteran campaigners. Up to this time the only reward of the British soldiers for all their hardships and sacrifice had been the consciousness of duty whole-heartedly done. But the capture of this garden area, and the promise of soon winning Jerusalem and the fine port of Jaffa, supplied every man with a tangible, material wage for his fighting and his labour, and introduced an exuberant note into the already high tone of Allenby's victorious army.

Ramleh, which stands on the main road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, is characteristic of all the Arab towns and villages on the maritime plain. Seen from a distance, with its scattered palms and dark background of olive-groves, it is a place of fair promise. Its low native houses are graced by the tower of the handsome white Christian church of Joseph of Arimathæa, and by the domes and minarets of Moslem mosques. But close association at once disillusiones the expectant traveller. Ramleh, like the smaller villages, is a town of narrow byways, a wretched Arab people, and indescribable filth.

On the morning of November 15th, when a squadron under Major Stodart, of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment, penetrated the town, both Arabs and Christians seized the stirrups of the Australians, kissed their dusty boots, and hailed them with a tumultuous show of feeling which, if insincere in the Arabs, was a very convincing piece of mob acting.

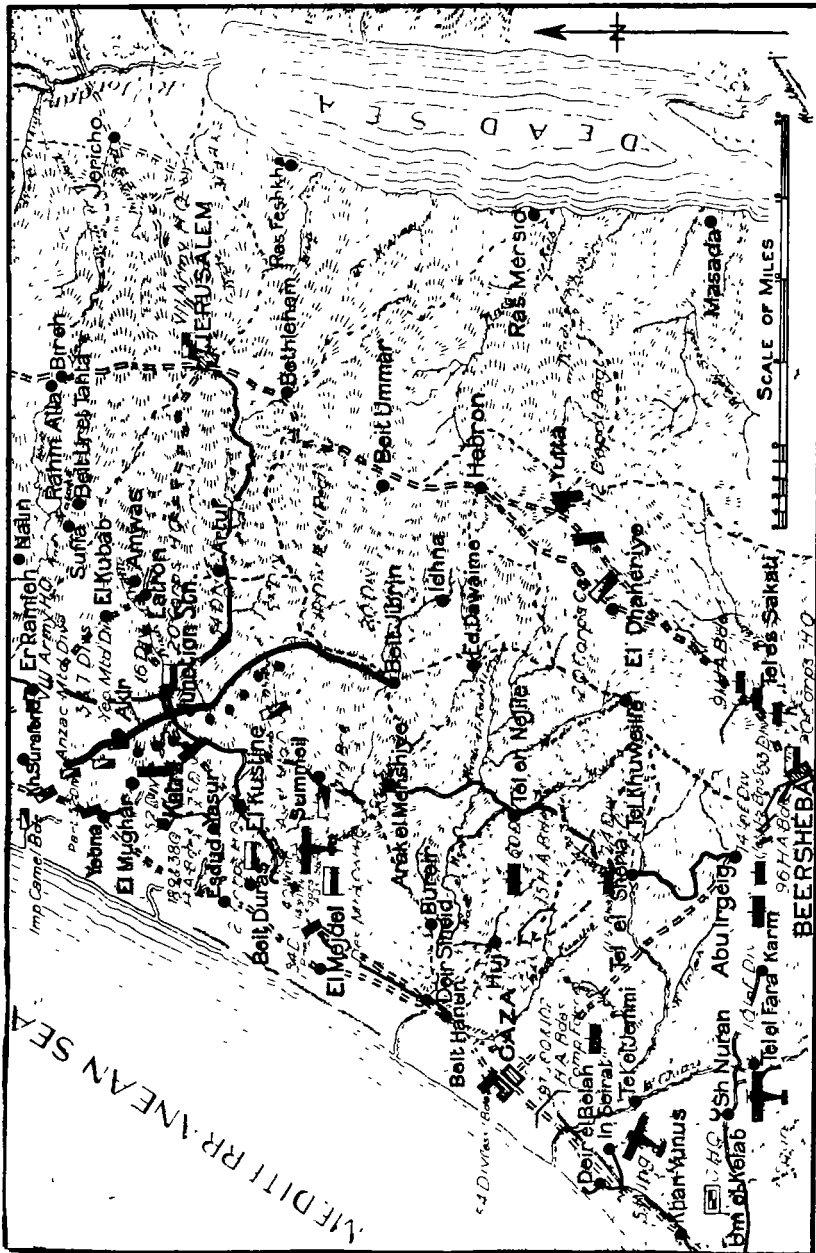
While Stodart searched the town, the 1st Regiment pushed rapidly through the olive-groves towards the ancient town of Ludd (Lydda), three miles further north. A column of Turks in full retreat was reported close ahead. Ludd was not defended, and, as the Australians rode into the large village, there was another wild demonstration of welcome. A glib dragoman, who had been in Cooks' service, appeared at the head of the village notables, formally welcomed the light horsemen and called for cheers for the British. The Arabs, following his lead, shouted mightily.

But Granville had serious work on hand, and led his men smartly through the excited crowd. Lieutenant W. H. James,⁵ who was temporarily in command of the squadron engaged on screen work, then reported that Turks were streaming along the road further north. "Get after them," replied Granville. James, with two troops, making a force about forty strong, at once took up the pursuit at the gallop. The Turks, strung out along the road for some miles towards the new German settlement of Wilhelmsia, made no attempt at resistance, despite the fact that they were armed infantrymen, with a few machine-guns attached. Galloping on either side of the columns, the Australians soon lost formation. The place of the individual in the chase was decided by the speed of his horse. Enemy gunners on the flank shelled Australians and Turks indiscriminately; but the head of the column was reached after a gallop of three miles, and then, under shrapnel and machine-gun fire at close range, James drove back his prisoners. Lieutenants E. S. Dowling⁶ and A. I. McDonald⁷ and five other Australians were wounded; Dowling, who had been previously wounded at Gallipoli, was shot in the face as he was leading his men. He was carried back for two miles, and was then hit again by shrapnel, this time mortally. This fine exploit resulted in the capture of 297 Turks (including fourteen officers), two Germans, and four

⁵ Lieut.-Col. W. H. James, M.C. 1st L.H. Regt. Contractor; of Medowie, Raymond Terrace District, N.S.W.; b. Tocal Station, Paterson, N.S.W., 22 March, 1887.

⁶ Lieut. E. S. Dowling, 1st L.H. Regt. Overseer; of Chatswood and Narromine, N.S.W.; b. Neutral Bay, Sydney, N.S.W., 13 Apr., 1896. Died of wounds, 18 Nov., 1917.

⁷ Lieut. A. I. McDonald, M.C. 1st L.H. Regt. Station hand; b. Melbourne, Vic., 24 Feb., 1893.



ADVANCE UP THE MARITIME PLAIN—POSITION AT 7 A.M., 14TH NOVEMBER, 1917.

machine-guns. During the day the prisoners secured by the brigade exceeded 350; at Ramleh a complete aeroplane was found in its case, and the town also contained a large shed filled with grain, and a further good supply of water. That night the brigade bivouacked round Ludd, with a strong outpost line to the north.

While Cox was winning Ramleh and Ludd, the New Zealanders, on the left, passed through the Jewish village of Richon le Zion (Ayunkara), which is the main centre of the new wine-growing district of Palestine, and contains very extensive cellars, and pushed on without serious opposition to the roads leading to Jaffa from Ramleh and Ludd. At the same time the detachment of Camels, which was still on the left flank, conformed along the coast. It was now clear that the enemy was withdrawing his right flank to the north of the Nahr Auja, a fine permanent stream which falls into the Mediterranean a few miles north of Jaffa. There the high ground, protected by the water-course, promised him a respite from the Anzacs, who were following, sufficient to enable him to re-organise, to prepare trenches, and to make a sustained stand. The way seemed clear to Jaffa, and the New Zealanders were eager to press on for the famous old seaport. But Allenby's plans did not include its immediate capture, and Meldrum was ordered to hold a line a few miles to the south.

Early on the morning of the 16th, however, the Wellington Regiment received orders to reconnoitre Jaffa. Occupation was not contemplated; but the eager Wellingtons, meeting with no opposition, pressed rapidly through the fringe of white residences standing among the orange-groves, and then into the picturesque jumble of buildings heaped upon the water's edge which make up the town itself. Jaffa contained many Syrians and other Christians of various nationalities, and these greeted the New Zealanders as sincerely as had the Jews of the orchard settlements. But Allenby's orders were never held lightly, and some hours elapsed before Chauvel ventured to advise the Commander-in-Chief of the successful but unauthorised enterprise.

During the 16th and 17th the villages of Sarona (a German orchard colony) and Summeil, towards the coast,

and the German settlement of Wilhelmsia, a few miles inland, were occupied. Patrols to the Wady el Auja reported it to be a stream thirty-five feet wide and from four to ten feet deep. Three crossings were located, one by a shallow ford where it joins the sea, one at a dam and bridge close to Khurbet Hadrah, and the third at a mill near Jerisheh. On the 17th the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade rejoined the Anzac Mounted Division, and that night the front held by the three brigades extended from Hill 265, on the right, through Kefr Ana, Hill 275, and Summeil to the sea. This line ran along the northern side of a belt of firm and well-grassed sand-hills, splashed occasionally with flourishing orchards; and the Anzacs, from their position, looked down into the narrow valley of the Auja, and could see the Turks busily digging round Sheikh Muannis, on the bare, high ground beyond.

So much, for the moment, as to the advance on the left. Towards the foot-hills of Judæa, on the east, the pursuit had been still more satisfactory and stirring. The heavy blow by yeomanry and infantry at Katra and Mughar had, in effect, pierced the Turkish centre. Hitherto the enemy's two armies, the Eighth on the plain, the Seventh towards the foot-hills, had maintained a united, if disorganised, front. But after the fighting at Mughar and the capture of Junction Station, the Seventh Army was swung back into the hills about Latron, to put down a definite barrier between Allenby's forces and Jerusalem. There, on high, rough ground, it occupied a position of great natural strength across the gateway to Judæa by the main metalled road from Jaffa. The Seventh Army was thus secured against the compulsion to make further retreating marches; but the movement at once imposed a new and formidable strain on Turkish supplies. So long as the army remained on the plain, it was fed and munitioned by the railway leading down into Sharon from Tul Keram; on the other hand, with the loss of this railway and of the main road from Ramleh, it was made dependent upon the railway and the steep road down the range from Jerusalem. The Jaffa-Jerusalem line terminated at Jerusalem; all supplies had to be transported to the Holy City by

road from Nablus, in Samaria, over a rough mountain highway, or from the Hejaz railway at Amman, far away in eastern Palestine. The sixty miles of road between Jerusalem and Amman included the descent of 3,000 feet into the great gorge of the Jordan valley, and the climb by steep and difficult roads on the eastern side, while the track across the plateau of Moab was likely to become almost impassable as soon as the season of heavy rains commenced. Difficulties of supply in short, made the Turkish defence of Jerusalem and the hills west and north-west of the town exceedingly onerous.

While the Seventh Turkish Army swung into the Judæan hills about Latron, the Eighth continued its retreat to the north, with the result that a gap, with but a slight line of contact, appeared between the two forces. This gap was fatal to the safety of Jerusalem. The bold features of Latron (the legendary home of the Penitent Thief), with its ruins and fine Trappist monastery, commanded the Vale of Ajalon, by which the road enters the Judæan hills on its winding course to Jerusalem. But except for a narrow saddle on which stands, slightly to the north-east, the village of Amwas, the hill is detached from the main range, and offered no great obstacle to a flanking movement by Chauvel's mounted troops. The Turks therefore decided to attempt to cover the entrance to the valley by holding the high ground about Abu Shushe and Tel Jazar, on the hills of the Shephelah, a few miles to the south-west. In this they followed, as did the leaders of both armies during the whole campaign, the tactics of the Crusaders and their foes, and of the captains of ancient hosts. The possession of Tel Jazar, a bare hill containing ruins of many successive civilisations, has at all times been a necessary preliminary to an army advancing up the Vale of Ajalon, or debouching from that pass on to the Philistine plain.

The Turks strongly held Tel Jazar and the high ground leading to the boldly-placed village of Abu Shushe, and on the morning of November 15th offered effective resistance to the infantry of the 75th Division, which was now pressing with all its might towards Latron. As at Mughar, the Yeomanry Division was ordered to assist in the assault of the enemy positions, and again the task fell to Godwin's 6th

Mounted Brigade. The yeomanry had nearly three miles of exposed ground to cover, and a stiff hill to climb, before they could get to grips with the defenders. Godwin sent forward six machine-guns to give covering fire, and then, with support from the brigade battery and some guns of the 52nd Division, launched a mounted attack. The yeomanry, who were led with fine judgment by their regimental officers, charged with splendid spirit and overwhelming success. The Turks, startled by the rush of the horsemen, shot wildly, and deserted their posts as the British closed. Between 400 and 500 enemy dead were counted on the field, and 360 were taken prisoner. The yeomanry suffered only thirty-seven casualties. It was in this charge, while riding sword in hand at the head of his squadron, that Neil Primrose, second son of Lord Rosebery and a member of the House of Commons, was killed. Young Primrose had already shown much promise in public life; he was also a man of endearing personal parts, and his father's favourite son. "I loved him," said the old statesman afterwards, "from the moment when I first saw him in his mother's arms." He was, on his mother's side, descended from the house of Rothschild; and there is interest in the fact that he and his cousin, Evelyn Rothschild, who was killed in the charge at Mughar, were nephews of the Rothschild who founded several of the Jewish colonies round which the fighting was now taking place. Jezar's military importance is enhanced by the good water in its vicinity; and, with further abundant supplies in sight at Latron, Allenby's difficulties in this respect were practically at an end.

On the afternoon of the 14th the Australian Mounted Division (which then included the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Light Horse Brigades, the 5th and 7th Mounted Brigades, and two armoured cars) was placed under the orders of XXI Corps. The 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade, refreshed by its brief rest, was held in corps reserve near Yebna, on the west, while the remaining brigades of the division were operating on the right flank. During the 15th and 16th the brigades maintained a close watch against possible enemy aggression on the line Turmus-Tel el Safi-Kezaze, and with the Yeomanry Division on the left made strong reconnaissance

towards Amwas, the Emmaus of the New Testament. The country, however, was rough; the enemy, as he withdrew slowly into the hills, presented a strong rear-guard bristling with machine-guns; and progress was retarded. At times, also, the horsemen came under very active shell-fire, which caused a number of casualties to the 7th Regiment of Ryrie's brigade, and Lieutenant E. L. Zouch⁸ died of wounds received at this time. The village of El Kubab was occupied on the 16th by the 7th Mounted Brigade, where it was relieved on the 17th by the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade.

⁸ Lieut. E. L. Zouch, 7th L H Regt. Farmer, of Ashley, N S W., b. Goulburn, N S W, 22 May, 1890 Died of wounds, 17 Nov., 1917.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOWARDS JERUSALEM

ON November 16th Allenby called his three corps commanders to a conference at Bulfin's headquarters. In seventeen days the Gaza-Beersheba barrier had been shattered, some 10,000 prisoners, many guns, and much material captured, and the enemy driven in disorder for nearly sixty miles. But the Commander-in-Chief, despite this great achievement, was not satisfied. The crippling of his mounted divisions, owing to the shortage of water in the critical week after Beersheba, had enabled the foe to escape complete destruction and to withdraw with his main force and most of his guns. A stern, slow campaign in the hills was still necessary before Jerusalem could be taken and the British advance continued over Judæa to the Jordan. The engineers, with their swarms of Egyptian labourers, had already carried the broad-gauge railway over the Wady Ghuzze and up to Gaza, and flying gangs further north were repairing the destroyed bridge and culverts on the Turkish narrow-gauge lines, and putting into use the captured engines and rolling stock. Arrangements were complete for landing stores from the sea at the mouth of the Wady Sukereir, and the possession of Jaffa ensured a useful port of entry still further north. Nevertheless, the question of supplies was one which might have deterred a leader less forceful and determined than Allenby from the plan he now unfolded to Chauvel, Chetwode, and Bulfin for an immediate advance through the hills upon Jerusalem.

Nor was transport Allenby's one cause for grave concern. On November 11th he had received from the War Office a cablegram which greatly increased his personal responsibility. He was told that "while no opportunity should be lost of weakening the enemy's defensive power," his force should not be drawn into a position which it could only hold with difficulty, as the situation in Europe "is such that by the summer the (British) forces in the East may have to be reduced to the minimum required for defensive purposes." Nevertheless, the War Office in-

structed him to exploit his success to the utmost. Moreover, it was particularly impressed upon him that the Moslem holy places must be respected. In other words, the Commander-in-Chief was ordered to exploit his success to the utmost, and win Jerusalem; but, if this policy led to any disaster or subsequent embarrassment, the War Office would, after its warning, accept no part of the responsibility.

Allenby did not hesitate. His original objective had been the "line of the two Aujas" from the Nahr Auja, which falls into the Mediterranean above Jaffa, to the Wady Auja, a little stream which, bursting from springs in the desert foot-hills above the Jordan valley, flows eastwards to the Jordan River about ten miles north of the Dead Sea. His flanks would then be surely placed, and he would be, as he had advised the War Office, in a position to raid the railway and the Turkish communications from Deraa to the Hejaz.

But Jerusalem must first be isolated and captured; and this must be achieved without fighting in its immediate neighbourhood. We have seen that the Holy City was now cut off from railway communications, and that the Turkish Seventh Army, which defended it behind Latron, was dependent on roads leading from Nablus and Amman. Of these the main, and only practicable, route for heavy supplies was the road from Nablus. Allenby's plan was simple in design, but extremely difficult of execution. He aimed by a rapid advance with the Yeomanry Mounted Division to drive a wedge between the two Turkish armies, and straddle the Nablus road at Bireh, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem. At the same time the 52nd and 75th Divisions were to advance on the city due east, astride the main road from Latron, while a force known as "Mott's Detachment" (made up of the 53rd Division and a regiment of cavalry, the Westminster Dragoons) was to push north from Dhaheriye along the Hebron-Jerusalem road. The 54th Division, now attached to the Desert Mounted Corps, was to operate on the coastal sector held by the Anzac Mounted Division. Thus Chauvel was responsible for holding the coastal sector and also for the advance of the Yeomanry Division to Bireh, while the Australian Mounted Division was temporarily placed under the command of Bulfin of the XXI Corps.

The country occupied by the Turks between the coastal plain and Jerusalem has in all ages favoured its defenders. The little kingdom of the Jews, set amid a sea of warlike and strong nations, only rose and flourished—and gave the world two of its great religions—by the grace of the almost unassailable heights upon which it was located. The uplands of Judæa are not cast on a scale of grandeur. Their highest peaks do not exceed 3,000 feet; but the world contains no other area which is at the same time sufficiently fertile to carry, as it did of old, a dense population, and sufficiently harsh, waterless, and rugged to obstruct and baffle the most powerful invaders. Judæa is a distorted pile of razor-backed ridges and narrow valleys, broken by groups of cone-shaped hills. Successive shelves of rock jut out from every hillside at intervals of a few yards. In the days of the kingdom these shelves were fashioned into narrow cultivated terraces, vegetation flourished from the little alluvial pockets in the valleys up to every skyline, and Judæa, softened with the foliage of olive and vine and with ribbons of growing corn, echoed with the life and activities of a great rural people. Only pressure from outside, and the impossibility of expansion to the fertile Philistine plain, could have compelled such industry and fruitfulness on a region naturally so hungry and forbidding. Long before its conquest by the blighting Turk, Judæa had lost its bloom, and during the Turkish possession almost every trace of its old rural glory has departed. The heavy rains of centuries have destroyed the little hillside garden terraces; torrential wadys, long uncontrolled, have swept the soil out of the narrow valleys. Judæa, as it was first seen at close quarters by the troops of Allenby's army, was a rough, stony skeleton of a country, "the carcase of a land," a region which, even in the world-wide land-hunger of the twentieth century, no peasantry in crowded Europe would deem worthy of settlement.

On this country stood the Seventh Turkish Army in defence of Jerusalem. Every military advantage was on the enemy's side. With the perfect cover provided by successive masses of rocky hills, a few thousand riflemen might alone have been deemed a complete obstacle to the British invaders. But the Turks were still well supported by artillery and were



THE ROAD FROM JAFFA TO JERUSALEM RUNNING THROUGH THE COUNTRY OF JUDAEA (THE
TRENCHES ON THE HILLSIDE HAD BEEN DUG BY THE TURKS)

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1714

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HEADQUARTERS OF A LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT ENCAMPED CLOSE TO THE
MEDITERRANEAN.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1689



JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1521

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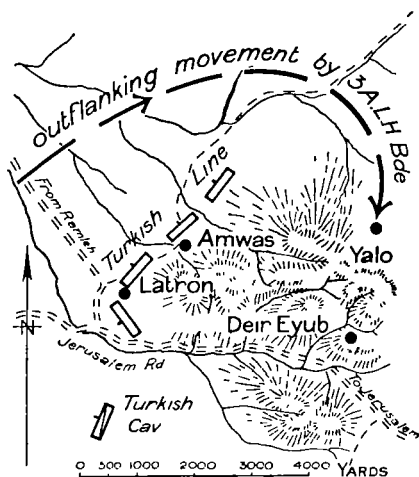
strong in machine-guns, and these from selected positions swept every crest and valley to the west. Their supply problem was a difficult one, but not more acute than that of their assailants would become immediately the rainy season commenced. Only one road fit for wheeled transport, the main highway from Jaffa, penetrated the hills from the plain; and this was worn and crumbling, and ran most of the way through narrow passes or along exposed ridges. That the Turks were slowly but surely forced back from one position to another, and that in less than a month Jerusalem was won, was due to a very rare combination of great military qualities in the British army at that time. An admirable tactical scheme, impelled by a leader of tremendous and infectious driving power; whole-hearted and capable co-operation by corps, division, and brigade commanders; brilliant and self-sacrificing regimental leadership; dogged insistence by the infantry rank and file—these won Jerusalem for Britain.

As a preliminary to the advance of the 75th Division into the hills, the Australian Mounted Division on November 18th forced the enemy from Latron by a flanking movement on the north. The Turks were reported to be evacuating Jerusalem, and Chauvel ordered Barrow with his yeomanry to move rapidly on Bireh and cut off the retreat. Hodgson was to attack the Latron-Amwas position early in the afternoon and, if successful, to push on towards Bireh, on the right of the yeomanry. The 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade on the left was to endeavour to outflank Latron from the north and north-east while the 4th Brigade made a direct assault.

This day's operations served to bring home to all leaders the nature of the task ahead. As Scott with the 9th Regiment on the flank pushed into the hills on his enveloping movement, he came under brisk fire from machine-guns and light artillery. No Turks showed on the dark, harsh hills ahead, but each approach was evidently watched and guarded. For some hours the 8th and 9th Regiments probed fruitlessly at the frowning ramparts. So steep and rocky was the ground that the horses had frequently to be led. After much difficulty, the Notts Battery was brought forward, and was rewarded with a good target on four enemy guns near Amwas;

these the gunners silenced at a range of 5,000 yards, and they were next day found by the British infantry. Towards evening, as the result of a striking change in Bulfin's tactics, the 3rd and 4th Brigades were withdrawn. On the left the Yeomanry Division had made indifferent headway towards Bireh. Like the Australians, they found the country impossible for mounted action. Shilta had been occupied, and the troops had advanced within two miles of Beit ur et Tahta (Lower Bethoron); but the batteries of horse artillery had found the old track impossible for wheels. Some of the guns were man-handled for miles, and the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery, mounted on its stalwart camels, climbed almost as far as the advanced troops. In the face of the opposition everywhere met by the Australian and Yeomanry Divisions it was obvious that a mounted advance was impracticable. As of old, Jerusalem, if it was to be won, must be assailed by infantry.

Bulfin decided to attack Latron on the following day with the 75th Division, while the 52nd Division was to strike into the hills by the Beit Likia on its left. The light horse were not to play an active part in the capture of Jerusalem. Yet the advance into the hills by Wilson's brigade on the 18th provided a good example of the effect of that sort of enveloping movement which can be made only by mounted troops, even though it is not at the time attended by material results. A patrol of Scott's advanced troops under Sergeant G. G. Masson¹ had penetrated as far as Yalo, a native village about five miles almost due east of Amwas. Next morning, when the



¹ Lieut. G. G. Masson, 9th L H Regt. Farmer; of Kulde, S. Aust.; b. Nairne, S. Aust., 14 Apr., 1887.

75th Division moved on Latron, they found the position evacuated; the Turks, fearing that isolation and capture would follow the thrust to Yalo, had abandoned strongly-held ground, and the men of the 75th were saved severe fighting and heavy casualties.

In the advance up the maritime plain as far as the Jaffa-Jerusalem road, Allenby had been able to employ only two of his seven infantry divisions, and to keep even these two on the march at an increasing distance from railhead had imposed a heavy strain on all the transport. The idle divisions in rear had been stripped of every vehicle and camel they could spare to serve the 75th and 52nd. So long as the weather continued fine, the advanced troops could be supplied. But the rains were now overdue; and on the evening of November 19th, as the infantry began their fighting climb through the hills towards Jerusalem, a thunder-storm, followed by a drenching downpour, broke over the opposing armies. In a few hours every wady, great and small, in the foot-hills and on the plain was in flood, and the black soil, hard and firm in the summer, became sticky and heavy for marching and almost impassable for wheels. The temperature, which had been hot by day and balmy and pleasant by night, dropped rapidly, and piercingly cold weather succeeded. The infantrymen had been marching light; no man carried more than one blanket, and many none at all. They were clad in summer clothes—twill shorts and tunics—which offered no resistance to the driving rain and bitter chill. Palestine is almost everywhere a timberless country, and the natives have stripped it bare of fuel for the cooking of their scanty fare. The months which followed were hard on all the troops, whose blood was thin after their long campaign in the heat; but they were especially severe on the British infantry, as it climbed higher each day on to the bleak and exposed uplands of Judæa.

The problem of supply was at once intensified. Except on the route between Jaffa and Jerusalem, the roads were seldom formed or metalled. Within a few hours after the downpour began, hundreds of teamsters and drivers of motor-lorries were floundering in the mud, many of them stuck and all of them running late. Even with fine weather and dry

ground, the advance through the narrow passes to the Holy City would have been an undertaking demanding fine tactical work, heavy sacrifices from the infantry, and devoted service all the way from distant railhead to the rear of the fighting men. The rain doubled the magnitude of the task. But there was no hesitation by the High Command, and no thought of failure by the force committed to the hills. Clearing Latron early in the afternoon, the troops of the 75th Division advanced rapidly up the wide valley behind the village which leads to the first of the passes. From there to Jerusalem the road led by narrow ways winding crookedly through the mass of rocky hills, strongly manned by the Turks, and all now oozing water. Slipping and floundering, drenched and cold, but every man moved by consciousness of his high mission, the infantry pressed forward. Happily many of the British troops of the 75th Division were old campaigners from the Indian frontier, who, with the Gurkhas included in the division, were experienced in hill tactics and fighting. The Turks, invisible in their rocks, were almost unassailable by frontal attack; but the British and the Gurkhas, again and again working wide on their flanks while holding them in front, menaced the rear of position after position, and steadily pressed them back on either side of the road. It was an advance by battalions, companies, and platoons rather than by division or brigade; it was illumined by countless acts of superb daring, by swift thrusts of small parties engaged on the flanks, and, at decisive moments, by plain, heavy frontal blows, careless of cost.

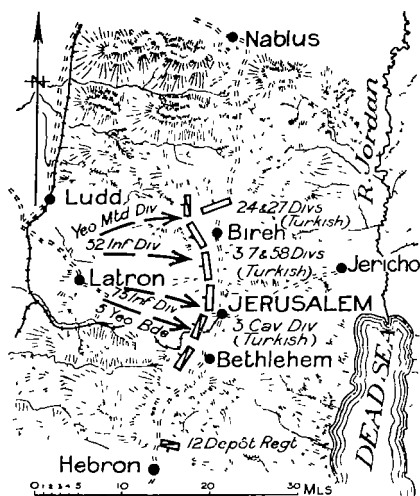
All the way it was essentially an infantry campaign. The British batteries laboured hard in the rear. But they were confined to the road, where effective gun-positions were restricted; and even along the road their progress was retarded by the destruction done by the enemy as he retreated. At times the gunners found good targets; but in the main the infantry drove the enemy from height to height with machine-gun, rifle, and bayonet. Saris, a high knoll where the enemy's defence was aided by a group of olives and a native village, was wildly stormed; on the following morning Abu Ghosh, or Enab (the "town of grapes"), a very stout position, was rushed by the Gurkhas, Somersets, and Wilts under cover of

an opportunely dense mountain mist. Here the monastery and convent church, and the summer residence of the German Consul at Jerusalem, gave temporary shelter for a night to a few of the frozen troops. But nearly all these men were now wet and cold by day and night, as well as short of hot and stimulating food. From Enab they fought on to Kustal, and then made for the dominating point of Nebi Samwil (where the bones of the prophet Samuel are supposed to be buried), always the key to an advance on Jerusalem from this side. The Turks had dug deeply into the hilltop, and tenaciously defended it. But Brigadier-General Maclean's 234th Brigade, advancing by darkness, carried it at midnight on the 21st—a fine test of the quality of these troops, when the extreme roughness of the country is considered. Three times on the 22nd the Turks made bold attempts to regain the position, and, aided by the rough ground, each time worked up very close before they were checked by the British and the Indians.

From Nebi Samwil the infantry could see peeps of the buildings of Jerusalem, and even those who were not animated by religious fervour were stirred by the sight of what was to every man the deeply significant goal of his endeavour. The Turks shelled the peak ceaselessly with 5.9's and other artillery; the old mosque on the summit was destroyed, and British losses were heavy. But the issue was never in question. The moral ascendancy of the British soldier was so pronounced at this time that the 75th Division was almost insensible to its very severe casualties. Nebi Samwil, the Mizpah of the Old Testament, the Montjoye of the Crusaders, marked the limit of King Richard's forlorn advance in January, 1192. Although the soldier is usually careless of the associations of the country over which he is fighting, these troops took a remarkably close and intelligent interest in the battlegrounds of the Old Testament and of the Crusaders. All or nearly all the Christian troops had during the long campaign diligently read their Bible as they had never read it before, and were arrested by the amazing fidelity of its atmosphere and colour. Guide-books of the Holy Land were studied in detail and read aloud round every camp-fire; and there were few among the soldiers who were not moved by the tragedy of the Lion's Heart's failure, or who

did not make a sporting resolution to carry, after the lapse of 700 years, Richard's mission to a triumphant conclusion.

While the 75th was advancing so finely, the 52nd on the left and the Yeomanry Division still further north were fighting against similar obstacles and with equally heavy losses. But the absence of roads left them almost entirely without artillery support, and the Turks soon brought their advance to a stop. It became clear that Bireh could not be reached by a simple swift stroke, and that Jerusalem must be won by the exercise of pressure close to the city itself. The yeomanry were fighting dismounted, their horses being used to "pack" supplies up to them.



They reached a position between Beit ur el Foka (Upper Bethoron) and Beitunia, and were then compelled to retire a little way. About the same time the 52nd Division was withdrawn from the line and put to work for a day on the roads behind the 75th, which was then endeavouring to advance from Nebi Samwil to the capture of El Jib, a village on a commanding height a mile and a half to the north. El Jib lies only a few miles west of the Nablus road, and its capture might have lessened resistance on the yeomanry's front. On the 22nd and 23rd the 75th made desperate attempts to reach the village, but was each time stopped after suffering severe losses. The battalions of the division, although still fighting with splendid courage, were now sorely diminished by losses, especially among their officers, and the men were exhausted by exposure, constant fighting, and lack of sleep. On the night of the 23rd, therefore, the 75th was

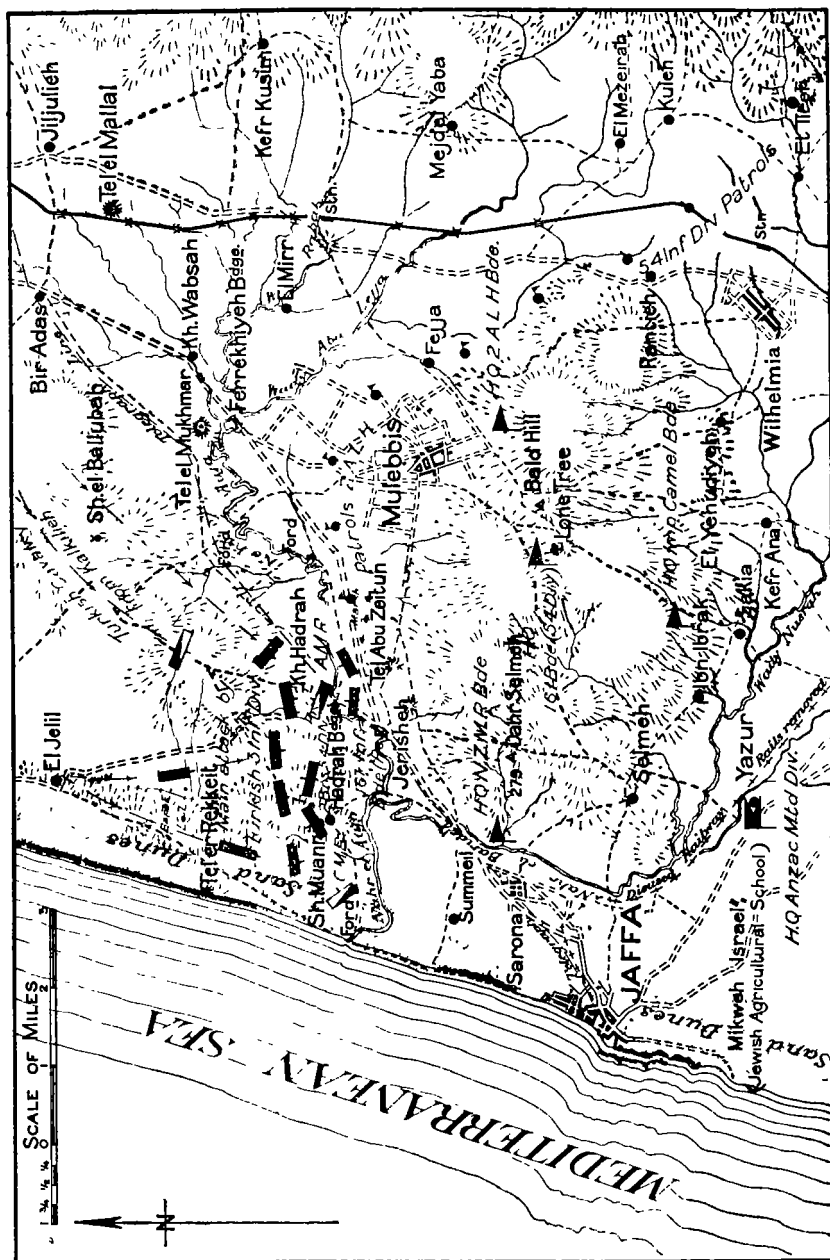
relieved by the 52nd, and next morning the Lowlanders endeavoured to win the El Jib position. But the Turks, driven by leaders who recognised that if the Holy City was to be saved more ground must not be yielded, shot well and fought stubbornly, and again the attack broke down. General Bulfin then asked for the assistance of the 60th Division, which had marched up from the Gaza area and was now at Latron. The advance was halted while the 60th moved into the hills, and the 74th Division was ordered to come up as rapidly as possible from Mejdcl.

When the mounted attack on Latron and Amwas was cancelled on November 18th, the 3rd and 4th Light Horse Brigades were withdrawn for a brief sorely-needed rest. But Bulfin, at Chauvel's request—and appreciating the desire of the Australians to participate in the fight for Jerusalem—had ordered the 10th Regiment under Todd to be attached to the 5th Mounted Brigade, which was to advance along the railway line up the valley of Sorek (the Wady es Surar), some three miles south of the flank of the 75th Division. A few days later the yeomanry brigade was withdrawn, owing to difficulties of supply, and the Western Australians, remaining with the infantry, were for a time the only mounted troops engaged in the direct attack.

Though the Turks had succeeded in fighting the 75th and 52nd Divisions to a standstill, and imposed on Allenby the bringing up of the 60th and 74th Divisions to the assault, their condition was nevertheless becoming desperate. With all their advantage of ground and superiority in numbers, both of men and guns, they might have denied Jerusalem to the two exhausted British divisions and the yeomanry. But they were no longer in a condition to resist the onslaught of the two fresh divisions which the Commander-in-Chief was now able, thanks to the temporary return of fine weather and the revival of his transport capacity, to bring forward. Major von Papen—the same who had earlier in the war become notorious at Washington, and who was now serving with the Turks—in a letter to Count Bernstorff on November 21st gives a graphic description of the plight of the enemy. "We have had a very bad time," he wrote. "The breakdown of the army, after having to relinquish the good positions in

which it had remained for so long, is so complete that I could never have dreamed of such a thing. But for this dissolution we should still be able to make a stand south of Jerusalem even to-day. But now the Seventh Army bolts from every cavalry patrol. Many reasons have contributed to this sorrowful result, chiefly incapacity on the part of the troops and their leaders. Single men fight very pluckily, but the good officers have fallen, and the remainder have bolted. In Jerusalem alone we arrested 200 officers and 5,000-6,000 men deserters. Naturally, Enver pressed very strongly to hold on to Jerusalem with all possible means, on account of the political effect. From a military point of view it is a mistake, for this shattered army can only be put together again if entirely removed from contact with the enemy and fitted out with new divisions. This, however, can only take place after the lapse of months. Now it is just a toss-up."

This appreciation, characteristically German in its arrogant and ungenerous attitude to the Turks, shows the state to which the enemy was reduced. But, in view of the ordeal through which the Turkish army had passed since October 31st, it fails to give credit to the stubborn and effective resistance offered to the 75th and 52nd British Divisions. The breakdown was due rather to the German and Turkish staff work, and to the wretchedness of the army's supplies, than to the lack of fighting qualities in the Turkish soldier.



TURKISH ATTACK ON NAHR EL AUJA LINE, 25TH NOVEMBER, 1917.

CHAPTER XXIX

NAHR AUJA AND EL BURJ

BEFORE proceeding further with the narrative of the capture of Jerusalem, it is desirable to turn to the operations carried out by the British on the extreme left flank, which had an important influence upon the fighting in Judæa. By November 20th the Anzac Mounted Division had established a strong line of entrenched posts running from Nalin on the right through Budrus and El Yehudiyeh, and thence by high ground south of Tel Abu Zeitun to the sea. At this time the Turkish line on the coastal sector traversed the high ground north of Nahr Auja as far as Ferrekhiyeh, where it crossed the stream and ran south-east to the foot-hills. As the 54th Division marched up from the south it was placed under Chauvel's orders; the Camel Brigade was also advanced into the area, while the 1st Light Horse Brigade was sent back to a position near the beach south of Yebna to rest. On the 21st the Camels took over the line from Yehudiyeh to Hill 265, and the 161st Infantry Brigade was ordered to relieve the New Zealanders and free them for action, if necessary, across the Auja. During this time mounted patrols pushed aggressively up to the Auja crossings, and to the villages further east. At Mulebbis, an extensive Jewish colony, large stores of horsefeed were discovered. But everywhere the patrols were sharply fired upon, and it was evident that the enemy was prepared to resist a further advance up the plain of Sharon.

To prevent the withdrawal of troops of the Eighth Turkish Army from Sharon to assist in the defence of Jerusalem, Allenby decided to demonstrate strongly along the coast, so as to lead the enemy to anticipate a further advance in that direction. On the 24th, therefore, Chauvel moved to establish at least one bridgehead on the north bank of the Auja. Early in the afternoon the ground covering all the crossings was vigorously shelled, and, while the whole line displayed menacing activity, the Canterbury Mounted Rifles crossed the Auja at the ford on the beach, put to flight a small party of Turkish infantry, and seized Sheikh Muannis.

The Wellington Regiment, following, moved by Muannis and captured the bridge at Khurbet Hadrah; and a battalion of infantry crossed by the mill at Jerisheh. The enemy's outposts were everywhere taken by surprise, and about thirty Turks were captured, while the British sustained no losses. That night the infantry with four companies held posts at Khurbet Hadrah and Muannis, covered by a squadron of the New Zealanders, who also guarded the ford on the beach. All night the engineers worked at constructing a bridge at the Jerisheh mill and improving the crossing at Khurbet Hadrah, with a view to establishing two strong bridgeheads on the 25th.

Allenby's scheme succeeded almost too well. Before dawn on the 25th the Turks advanced in strength upon the Auckland Mounted Rifles, who were covering the infantry in front of the Hadrah crossing. The Canterburys at once moved from the mouth of the Auja against the Turkish right; but the enemy pressed his attack in considerable numbers, the Aucklands were forced back on the infantry, and the little combined force was heavily shelled. Pressing in, about 1,000 strong, from the direction of El Jelil, the Turks could not be arrested, and the infantry, covered by the New Zealanders and some machine-guns, were withdrawn to the south bank of the stream. The New Zealanders followed, and the Turks took up a position on Khurbet Hadrah.

Shortly before 9 o'clock, as the British infantry at Sheikh Muannis, assisted by a battalion on the south, were preparing for a counter-attack on the enemy at Khurbet Hadrah, they came under severe shell-fire, and the enemy could be seen advancing in force. An hour later the Turks, in spite of effective shelling by the Somerset Battery, still pushed rapidly forward. Very hard-pressed, the infantry, covered by a squadron of the Aucklands and two troops of the Canterburys, fell back towards the bridge at Jerisheh. Some, however, were cut off from the crossing and were obliged to pass the stream in boats, while a few had to swim. The New Zealanders remained to give covering fire to the British; then, with the Turks very close to them, they in turn took to the water. The position, although exciting, had never been critical, and the New Zealanders enjoyed the lively

character of the little enterprise. That night the original line was occupied by the mounted troops and infantry, and the artillery on the sector (made up of a few 6-inch howitzers, one 4.5-inch howitzer battery, two 18-pounder batteries, and three batteries of Royal Horse Artillery) registered the crossings as a precaution against a further enemy offensive. The Turks showed no disposition to attempt to force the Auja; but on the 27th they began to display activity against Hill 265 (afterwards known as "Bald Hill"), which was held by a company of the 4th Battalion of the Camel Brigade, and against the line on its right. The Camel positions were heavily bombarded with 4.2's; Mulebbis, after having been patrolled by troops of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade in the morning, was occupied by the enemy in strength only two hours later, and Wilhelmsia was bombarded.

At about noon the line of Ryrie's brigade was being intermittently shelled, and the light horsemen could see Turks creeping through the orchards about 1,000 yards in front of the Camel Brigade. A troop of the Australians, under Lieutenant R. S. Billington,¹ caught these in flank with a Hotchkiss gun, and caused many casualties, but the movement towards the Camels made steady progress. Ryrie's headquarters were persistently shelled, and Major Bryant, of the Ayrshire Battery, a bold artillery officer who had supported the light horsemen in many fights, was killed.

A strong force of Turkish infantry then advanced under cover of the barrage, and the company of the 4th Battalion which occupied the post on Bald Hill was driven off, retiring for about 500 yards. The Turks immediately entered the post, and with enfilade fire compelled the evacuation of three posts held by the same battalion on the right. This in turn made a post known as "Ypres Salient," occupied by the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, untenable. All the posts were at once manned by the enemy, who, however, attempted no further advance.

Bald Hill was a commanding knoll, valuable to either side if it could be held. General Smith was ordered to retake it after dark, if not before. At 7.30 p.m. Camel patrols, pushing

¹ Capt. R. S. Billington, M.C. 5th L.H. Regt. Clerk; b Enoggera, Q'land, 23 Feb., 1894.

on to the hill, found the southern slopes occupied by about 500 Turks with machine-guns; but with a swinging bayonet charge the Camels re-occupied the three posts previously evacuated on the right of the hill. Smith, whose leadership was always marked by sound and independent judgment, insisted that the knoll was a No-Man's Land, and that gunfire from either side could make it untenable by infantry. This view was accepted by Chaytor, and afterwards by Chauvel, and was proved to be correct—to the great satisfaction of the men of the Camel Brigade, who had smarted under the criticism at first levelled at them for losing the position.

Simultaneously with the attack on Bald Hill, the Turks had made a stout effort to push the infantry of the 54th Division out of Wilhelmsia, but were driven off with considerable losses. They also crossed the Auja, and established a post near the Hadrah bridge. Here they were successfully raided after dark by the infantry, who killed fifty and captured eight prisoners, with only nominal losses to the British. The enemy continued to shell the posts and back areas, but the Anzac trenches were excellently dug, and the effect was slight. The plan to pin the Eighth Turkish Army on the western sector, while the 60th and 74th Divisions in the hills prepared for the final assault on Jerusalem, had been richly rewarded, and all signs of activity on the Auja were welcomed by the Commander-in-Chief.

The Turks continued to appear on Bald Hill, and employed working parties there in the darkness, despite heavy shelling from the British batteries. On the night of the 29th the position was again raided by a company of the 4th Camel Battalion, supported by a squadron of the 6th Light Horse on the left under Captain Stuart Tooth. After the hill had been hotly bombarded, it was rushed by the Camels with the bayonet. The Turks met them with bombs at the foot of the hill, but were speedily swept back to the summit, when the Camels were withdrawn, their task only half accomplished. Tooth's squadron, however, whose mission was to enfilade the Turks if they attempted to follow the Camels on their withdrawal, blundered in the night on to a considerable enemy force, apparently massed for an attack. A lively

fight with bombs and rifle-fire ensued, and the enemy brought up a second force about 300 strong, which fell on Tooth's left flank. The light horsemen met the combined assault with fine coolness, and Tooth succeeded in establishing a line, upon which the struggle was bitterly waged. The Turks, however, threatened to envelop the line, and Tooth withdrew his squadron for about 300 yards, found a good position, and held on until daylight.

On another occasion a squadron of the 6th Light Horse Regiment, led by Captain D. C. Close,² raided the Ypres Salient, which had been evacuated to the enemy. The salient was to be heavily bombarded for ten minutes, after which the barrage was to lift for ten minutes, while the Australians made their dash at the enemy, and to be put down again to cover their withdrawal. Unfortunately the lift after the first ten minutes was not complete, and many of the Australians, as they rushed forward from their advanced position in an orchard, were caught by the barrage. Lieutenant Owen Tooth, brother to Stuart Tooth, was killed, Lieutenant H. Dickson³ wounded, and one other rank killed and twenty-two wounded in a few minutes by their own guns. But the attack was rapidly pressed, the trenches were entered, twenty Turks killed with the bayonet, and four taken prisoner. Then, bearing their dead and wounded, the Australians returned inside the ten minutes allotted for the enterprise.

During these days and nights the posts of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade along the crest of the hills were always active. The orchards enabled the enemy to creep up to close quarters in the darkness, and attacks were frequent. Major Barton, of the 7th Regiment, occupied a small entrenched position on Hill 330, in front of which was a wide garden of almond trees, crossed here and there by cactus hedges, sloping rapidly down to the valley of the Auja. One night the Australians heard Turks talking behind a cactus hedge about 150 yards away down the hill, and immediately afterwards officers could be heard calling out orders. Volleys of rifle-fire opened on the post. Barton had only nineteen men, with

² Maj. D. C. Close, 6th L.H. Regt. Station manager; of Moree and Warren, N.S.W., b. Stanmore, Sydney, N.S.W., 30 Aug., 1882.

³ Capt. H. Dickson, M.C. 6th L.H. Regt. Station manager; of New England District, N.S.W.; b. Barney Downs Station, Tenterfield, N.S.W., 18 July, 1874.

fifteen rifles and two Hotchkiss guns; but they knew the ground intimately and mauled the Turks severely as they came up the slope in the darkness. Both the Hotchkiss guns jammed, but the riflemen held the attackers at bay until dawn, when it was found that they had retired to the shelter of the cactus hedge. Within a few hundred yards on either side of Barton's trenches, but nearer the river, were Australian posts, which, as daylight broke, put down a barrage with Hotchkiss and rifle-fire behind the Turkish party, while Barton's men blazed into them from the front. The Turks, cut off from retreat and faced by destruction, raised the white flag, and Barton walked down and took the surrender of four officers and 194 men, with four machine-guns, rifles, and bombs.

The week's fighting along the Auja showed that despite von Papen's condemnation the enemy was already, at least on the plain of Sharon, recovering his spirit and still capable of a sporadic offensive. At times, however, there was evidence of the effects of the long and harassing drive which his troops had suffered. An outpost held by Lieutenant K. B. Suttor⁴ and Lieutenant Finlay, with only thirty rifles and two Hotchkiss guns, was attacked by an enemy party nearly 200 strong. The Turks were easily beaten off, many killed, and 150 made prisoner. On the night of December 1st three Turkish deserters, coming in to one of the 7th Regiment's posts, indicated by signs that some of their friends also wished to surrender. The information they could give was scanty and uncertain; but Lieutenant L. W. Davies,⁵ accompanied by Corporal R. G. Maguire⁶ and Trooper A. Dobbs,⁷ with a Turk as guide, went down through the orchards for three-quarters of a mile until they were behind one of the enemy's posts. But the information was correct, and they returned with twenty-four prisoners, including a Turkish officer.

On December 7th the Anzac Mounted Division handed over the sector to the 52nd Division, but the New Zealand

⁴ Capt K. B. Suttor, 7th L.H. Regt. Station manager; b Waikato, Hamilton, N.Z., 1884. Died, 24 Aug., 1930.

⁵ Maj. L. W. Davies, M.C. 7th L.H. Regt. Of Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Esk. Q'land, 30 March, 1887.

⁶ Sgt R. G. Maguire, M.M. 7th L.H. Regt. Clerk; b. Yass, N.S.W., 1896.

⁷ L/Cpl. A. Dobbs, M.M. 7th L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 1895.

Brigade was left for some time in the line. The 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades were withdrawn to rest-camps at Richon and Wady Hanein. The light horsemen relished their brief holiday. For nearly a month the men had slept and fought in the clothes which they had worn when the great offensive began. For many days at a stretch they had neither washed nor shaved, and had been on a hard and scanty ration. As they moved south, their transport officers were busy bringing up from the south of Gaza tents, extra blankets, and all the gear of their standing camp—and, best of all, great loads of Australian mail-bags. Requisitioning officers ransacked the surrounding villages for tibbin for the horses. Mounted troops escaped the infantry's arduous marching under heavy packs, but pay in constant labour for the privilege of being carried on horses. Even in rest-camps the light horseman was working during most of the day. Feeding, watering, grooming, and cleaning the horse-lines keep the squadrons ceaselessly busy; and when the horses become reduced, as they were at this time, they demand particular care and nursing. Grooming is massage, to exhausted animals the best of tonics; as the campaign continued, the average light horseman spent far more than the regulation time in rubbing down his coveted waler, and tired men would walk miles if there was a chance of acquiring a bundle of green fodder or an extra nosebag of grain. But with all the demands of the horses the men found time to clean themselves and to rest. After a bath and the imperative "delousing," there followed a wonderful period of sleeping. Nothing was more remarkable than the manner in which these young men would sleep after some weeks of severe campaigning. Day after day, in sunshine or darkness, until nature had re-asserted herself, they were able to sleep heavily whenever they were free from the horse-lines, with the result that an utterly exhausted brigade, after a week's rest or even less, would take the track again as fresh as a lot of schoolboys.

The Australian Mounted Division, after its movement against Latron on November 19th, was (with the exception of the 5th Mounted Brigade, but with the 7th Mounted Brigade attached) placed in corps reserve, and, to ease the

strain on transport, was withdrawn to Mejdal, on the Philistine plain. There, in camps close to the sea, the Australians (less the 10th Regiment) engaged for a week in re-equipment, and were indulged with a few day's rest. The Jews provided them with fruit and vegetables, bread and honey, and sometimes wine; from the Arabs were obtained horse-feed and fresh meat. To the traveller in a normal season the Philistine plain is not inspiring. It is a rich land, but also a bare, dead, hushed land, with no note of youth or joy. The absence of trees, except round the scattered new settlements; the squalid, mud-built, flat-topped villages with their thieving and depraved Arab inhabitants; the industrious but timid and servile Jews; the wild dogs and strange birds, which howl and cry about the villages and camps by night; and, almost at every mile, the ruins of an old-time glory pointing the moral of greatness built on foundations of blood and lust and worldly ambitions, combine to depress all except the enthusiastic student or the delving archæologist. But to Chauvel's light horsemen the plain, after the blinding dust and heat of southern Palestine, was almost as the Promised Land to the tribes under Moses. They slept and swam and feasted, and hailed with cheers the arrival of the richly laden field-representatives of the Australian Comforts Fund and the light motor-cars of the A.I.F. canteens, which were never far from the fighting line. They explored the ruins of ancient Askalon, looked upon the valley where, unless tradition lies, David overthrew Goliath, flirted freely, despite the obstacle of language, with the pretty Jewish girls, spent every penny they could extract from their pay-books and from the fugitive pay officers, and in their simple, hearty way lived like kings.

Barrow's Yeomanry had now been engaged in hard dismounted fighting in the hills on the left of the infantry for more than a week. On November 26th Hodgson was ordered to move with the 3rd and 4th Australian Light Horse Brigades and the 7th Mounted Brigade to their relief. The enemy, appreciating the menace to the Nablus road, had been resisting the yeomanry with great stubbornness; his counter-attacks had regained Foka and other ground won by the British horsemen, and after very bitter fighting had driven

our infantry out of Suffa and Shilta. Hodgson's division reached Berfilya on the 28th and 29th. The struggle was still running strongly about Suffa, which, after twice changing hands, became No-Man's Land. The 7th Brigade at once became hotly engaged, and General Wigan was wounded. The 3rd and 4th Brigades were put into the line, with the 52nd Division on their right around El Burj, and the 74th on their left about one and a half miles north of Berfilya.

The country was extremely steep and rocky, and the position on the front was obscure. Between the attacks and the counter-attacks no Turks or trenches were within sight of the British; though bursts of effective machine-gun fire and very accurate sniping showed that the enemy was not far away. On November 28th the XX Corps had taken over the Jerusalem operations from the XXI, and the Australian Mounted Division was now under Chetwode's orders. All horses except those needed by gallopers were sent back to Ramleh, and the Australians were engaged purely as infantry. Rain was frequent, and the mountain cold intense. Some of the men had secured an issue of winter clothing; but most of them were in summer dress and, like the infantry, suffered acutely.

If the regiments of the 3rd and 4th Brigades rode into the hills refreshed, they were also much reduced in battle-strength. The month's hard fighting, rough living, and lack of sleep had caused heavy wastage by casualties and sickness; and, when one-fourth of the men had been sent back to Ramleh with the horses, there remained a very light force to oppose the enemy. The 8th Regiment, for instance, had only 105 men of all ranks available for the line out of a total of above 400 who had been with the regiment at Beersheba. As the Australians advanced towards the dominating hill on which stands the village of El Burj, they had their first taste of the bitter Judæan winter; but when some of them relieved a battalion of the 5th Royal Scots Fusiliers, they realised that they were more fortunate than the infantry. They found the Scotchmen clad in short twill khaki pants, without tunics, with one blanket to four men, very short of rations and without tobacco. "Our boys," wrote a light horse officer, "supplied the Jocks with matches and cigarettes, and the 'Dinkums,' as they always called us, were very popular."

The 3rd Brigade went into the line on the evening of the 29th. As the squadrons were so weak, Hodgson decided on the following day to strengthen them with the 4th Brigade. This necessitated moving Wilson's men about 1,000 yards to the left between Shilta and El Burj. The movement was made at dark, and threw the 3rd for the night into strange country. The 8th Regiment, now reduced to two squadrons, each about fifty strong, occupied two positions some 200 yards apart. One under Major Y. H. Walker⁸ was on a small hill to the right, and across the valley about 400 yards away was the left flank of the 4th Light Horse Brigade. On Walker's left, and somewhat to the rear, Major A. Crawford⁹ was placed on a higher hill with the other squadron of the 8th; still further to the left was the 9th Regiment. All along the front the line was occupied in a similar way, with troops on the knolls and the intervening low ground open. The infantry had built stone sangars to give them protection against both the enemy and the driving rain, and the light horsemen, crouching behind these, and ignorant of the country ahead, prayed for a quiet night. All round them the hills were extremely rocky, with occasional large caves hewn out of the outcrops of limestone.

By 10 p.m. the change was completed, and for two hours the hills were ominously quiet. Soon after midnight the sentries on Walker's post reported a movement only a few yards away, but could see nothing in the intense darkness. Walker called his men to arms, and began to report to Crawford by telephone. Next moment the post was rushed in great strength by the Turks, who were within bombing distance of the Australians before they were discovered. For a few minutes the light horsemen stood and fought with rifles, bayonets, and hand-grenades; then Walker, finding that his post was being enveloped from both flanks, ordered a withdrawal to the post held by Crawford on the higher hill. The vigorous resistance had steadied the enemy, who, like the Australians, were obstructed by the darkness, and Walker was able to fall back in good order to Crawford's hill and take

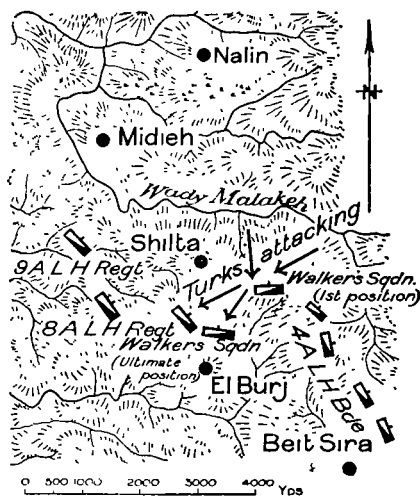
⁸ Maj. Y. H. Walker, M.C. 8th L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Nagambie, Vic., 29 Aug., 1895.

⁹ Lieut.-Col. A. Crawford, V.D. 8th L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Tatura, Vic., 6 Aug., 1887.

up a position there on the lower slopes to the left. As the two squadrons then waited in the darkness for the next assault, Crawford sent an urgent message to brigade for reinforcements, and at the same time fired flares as a call to the artillery. The guns of the 268th Royal Field Artillery Brigade and the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery promptly responded, and put down a barrage over the enemy approaches.

After an interval of complete silence, which was a greater strain on the nerves of the defenders than the fighting itself, about 500 Turks, with loud shouts of "Allah," rushed up the hill at Crawford's sangars. The Australians held their fire until the leading men were within twenty yards, and then shot them down in heaps with rifle and Hotchkiss, and at the same time bombed them effectively. Retaliating with bombs, the Turks pressed

bravely forward in a desperate effort to bring their greatly superior numbers into a hand-to-hand struggle with the Australians. But the Victorians fought on with splendid steadiness, and had the enemy soundly held, when forty-eight yeomanry of the Gloucester Regiment (which was at that time attached to the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in place of the 10th Regiment) came up under Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer. A few minutes later a company of the Royal Scots Fusiliers under Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart-Richardson also hastened up the hill and joined in the fight, and the Turks, coming under very severe punishment at a few yards' range, were driven to cover. At the same time the 9th Regiment on the left and the 4th Brigade on the right enfiladed their rear and cut off their escape.



The little composite British force remained on the hilltop until dawn, when the Turkish survivors, numbering six officers, including a battalion commander, and 112 other ranks, surrendered. More than 100 enemy dead lay close up to Crawford's sangars, and sixty wounded were collected, most of them badly mutilated by the point-blank fire. Captain Fay and Lieutenant S. V. Moore¹⁰ and five other ranks of the 8th Light Horse were killed, and two officers and thirty-five other ranks wounded; while the Scots had one officer and one man killed and two wounded, and the yeomanry three men wounded. The booty included large quantities of hand-grenades and eight automatic rifles. It was afterwards learned that the attacking force was a battalion of "storm-troops," selected in Galicia from the 19th and 20th Divisions, and specially trained by German officers. Physically they were the finest Turks seen by the Australians during the war. The Australian defence was distinguished by the cool leadership of Major Crawford, and by much excellent individual work, including that of Captain Macpherson and Lieutenant T. R. Peppercorn,¹¹ Sergeant-Major A. H. Currington,¹² and Trooper H. W. Keable.¹³

Had the enemy seized El Burj, the British would have been deprived of the use of the road leading up from Berfilya, and the Beit Nuba-Beit Sira valley would have become untenable. This would have weakened all the pressure towards the Nablus road, and exposed the left flank of the infantry which was making the main advance towards Jerusalem. Hodgson was therefore ordered to watch closely for a second attack. The artillery, which had been slowly advanced up the mountain by doubling the teams, steadily shelled enemy positions, intermittent indirect machine-gun barrage was put down on tracks leading to the Turkish posts, and a second defensive line was prepared to meet emergencies.

But the Turks were satisfied with their one disastrous

¹⁰ Lieut. S. V. Moore, 8th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Ararat, Vic; b. Murtoa, Vic., 8 Apr., 1894. Died of wounds, 1 Dec., 1917.

¹¹ Capt. T. R. Peppercorn, M.C. 8th L.H. Regt. Surveyor's student, of Gympie, Q'land; b. Caulfield, Melb., Vic., 19 Jan., 1893.

¹² Lieut. A. H. Currington, D.C.M. 8th L.H. Regt. Labourer; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Great Barford, Bedfordshire, Eng., 5 March, 1887.

¹³ Sgt. H. W. Keable, D.C.M. (No 1010, 8th L.H. Regt.) Stockman; of Mitchell, Q'land; b. Stanthorpe, Darling Downs, Q'land, 14 July, 1893.

attempt; from that time until their withdrawal from the hills early in January, the regiments of Australian Mounted Division had little or no fighting at close quarters. At times their stone sangars were freely shelled, and sniping was constant, but the men's chief grievance was against the weather and the conditions of living. Their plight was not extreme, as was that of the infantry, but it imposed sharp suffering, and they were called upon to endure it for many weeks. The tracks were impossible for transport, and rations were frequently short; waterproof sheets were not available; until after the fall of Jerusalem, when the line advanced into country containing olive-groves, they were without firewood for cooking. Wet by day and night, with boots broken and useless, underfed, and protected from the biting mountain winds only by the stone walls they constructed, their thoughts ran constantly on the conditions under which they had been living only five weeks before in the desert. But each day brought them cheering news of the slow but sure approach of the infantry towards Jerusalem, and the worst of hours were the subject of jest.

By the end of November transport was the main source of anxiety everywhere on the mountain front. Wheels were useless except on the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road, and even on that steep track, now holed and torn, the traffic was very slow. A special service of 2,000 donkeys and thousands of camels was therefore hastily organised and rushed into service. The agile little donkeys, bearing loads at which the army marvelled, saved the situation; but still more remarkable was the work of the camels. The great ungainly animals of the desert climbed the steepest tracks of wild Judæa, their long legs slithering on the greasy mud and the flat surface of the stones; and despite frequent heavy falls, and looking more dejected than anything else in the world, they went resignedly and gamely on by day and night up to the firing-line. Their Egyptian drivers rivalled them in courage and persistence. These unfortunate men, barefooted and clad only in light cottons, served the Commander-in-Chief with a degree of fidelity not rivalled by any of his British troops. At times a dead camel would be seen beside the rough track with its driver crouched dead at its side. The camel having surren-

dered, the Egyptian seemed in despair to have settled down and willed, with the resignation characteristic of Eastern peoples, to die beside his charge.

With the line of the Australian Mounted Division held only by posts, the front was elastic and the position at times confused. One night early in December a reduced company of British infantry, marching to the relief of the 11th Light Horse Regiment, lost direction, penetrated the enemy territory, and blundered on to Foka as they came back. Here a considerable enemy force was encountered. The British at once attacked, and a spirited rush gave them possession of the village and of 500 prisoners, whom they endeavoured to bring into the Australian lines. The Turks, however, appreciating the weakness of their captors, broke loose, and 200 escaped, taking with them a British officer and two of his men. The remaining 300 were rounded up and brought in.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM

AFTER it became clear that Jerusalem could not be isolated by a swift advance on the Nablus road at Bireh, it was decided to approach the city from the north-west, since heavy pressure from that direction, being a menace to the enemy's communications, would probably have compelled evacuation and saved much severe fighting. But the absence of roads and water led to the abandonment of this second scheme; and at a conference held at Yalo on November 30th it was decided to press the attack from the west and south-west. The enemy was now, with a last splutter of aggression, making a final and desperate attempt to save Jerusalem. On the night of December 1st, when he assailed the light horse at El Burj, he also fell heavily on the 157th Brigade of the 52nd Division about Tahta, and again made determined attempts to recapture Nebi Samwil. In the first rush at Tahta the Lowlanders were driven from ground of tactical importance, but after determined work with the bayonet they re-established their line. At Nebi Samwil, now held by the dependable Londoners of the 60th, the Turks made three strong advances; each time they were cut down by the accurate British fire and retired, leaving upwards of 400 dead on the approaches. Happily, Allenby had plenty of fresh troops available for his mission, and the 52nd Division was replaced by the 10th, which had been hurried up from Belah for the final assault. The 60th and 74th Divisions were both in good condition; the newly-arrived 10th was on their left; while Mott's Detachment, including the 53rd Division, was advancing from the south between Beersheba and Hebron. Sound staff work had provided an overwhelming superiority at the decisive moment. The Turks were not only outnumbered, but completely outclassed by the superior fighting condition of the troops opposed to them.

It was intended that Mott should not advance by the southern road until pressure in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem had compelled the retirement of the troops opposed to him. In his path lay Hebron, perhaps the most aloof and

purely Moslem centre of all the towns of Palestine. The ground of the Haram is believed by the faithful to contain the Cave of Machpelah, the traditional tomb of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and many other patriarchal personages, and the dark, austere, stone-built town is held sacred by Jews and Christians and Moslems. Further up the road, close to Jerusalem, was Bethlehem; and there must be no fighting near these Holy Places. Mott, therefore, felt his way cautiously, and waited for the enemy to fall back. He passed Dhaheiriye, and was sitting down south of Hebron, when one afternoon his patrols were startled to see two cars of the No. 7 Light Car Patrol, under Lieutenant McKenzie, coming down the road from the north. Besides a remarkable tale of adventures, McKenzie brought the astonishing news that Hebron had been evacuated by the enemy two or three days earlier. McKenzie himself had left Chauvel's headquarters at Deiran a few days before, accompanied by Captain W. A. Mulliner,¹ the Assistant-Provost-Marshal of the Australian Mounted Division, who had orders to arrest a Syrian required by the Intelligence Branch and supposed to be in hiding in Beit Jibrin. When McKenzie reached Beit Jibrin, he was told that the Syrian had gone to Hebron, and that Hebron had been evacuated by the Turks. He thereupon decided to strike for the town across country by the old Roman road up the Wady es Sunt to Solomon's Pools on the Jerusalem-Hebron road, a few miles south of Bethlehem. Leaving Beit Jibrin, the party followed a rough track through the Turkish outpost line, and killed several Turks with their machine-guns in a village after a hot fight over a low stone-wall. With enemy troops now on both sides of them, McKenzie pushed impudently on, and after many narrow escapes on the mountain tracks reached Solomon's Pools. As he raced south to Hebron he was again held up by a Turkish output, and again left a number of enemy dead by the track. Entering Hebron, he found it deserted by the Turks, except for the sick and wounded in a military hospital. The natives gave the party a boisterous welcome, accommodated them for the night, supplied a large

¹ Capt. W. A. Mulliner, A.P.M., Aust. Mtd. Div., 1917/19. Commercial traveller; of Melbourne, Vic.; b. Wolverhampton, Staffs., Eng., 11 Feb., 1883.

working party to repair the road at a place where the Turks had blown it up, and cheered the British as they started south. On McKenzie's information Mott marched immediately, passed through Hebron, and by December 6th reached the Bilbeh area, a few miles south of Bethlehem, where touch was made with the 10th Light Horse Regiment under Todd, who had occupied El Khudr.

Since entering the hills alongside the railway to Jerusalem, the Western Australians had been worked hard on road-making and reconnaissance. They were for the time the only mounted troops engaged in the actual advance on the Holy City, and despite the extreme cold and hardship were delighted with their good fortune. Although they had frequent fire-brushes with the enemy, they were not seriously engaged, and their part in the advance was secondary to that of the infantry battalions on their left. But by bold, probing patrols, most of them dismounted, over the rough hills, they kept clear the right flank of the 75th Division (as afterwards of the 60th Division), and gained much information of value to the corps commanders. As Mott's Detachment advanced from the south, they formed a link between the 53rd and 60th Divisions. Everywhere the Australians were cordially welcomed and kindly treated by the villagers, who supplied them with the enemy, they were not seriously engaged, and their scanty supply of rations and horsefeed.

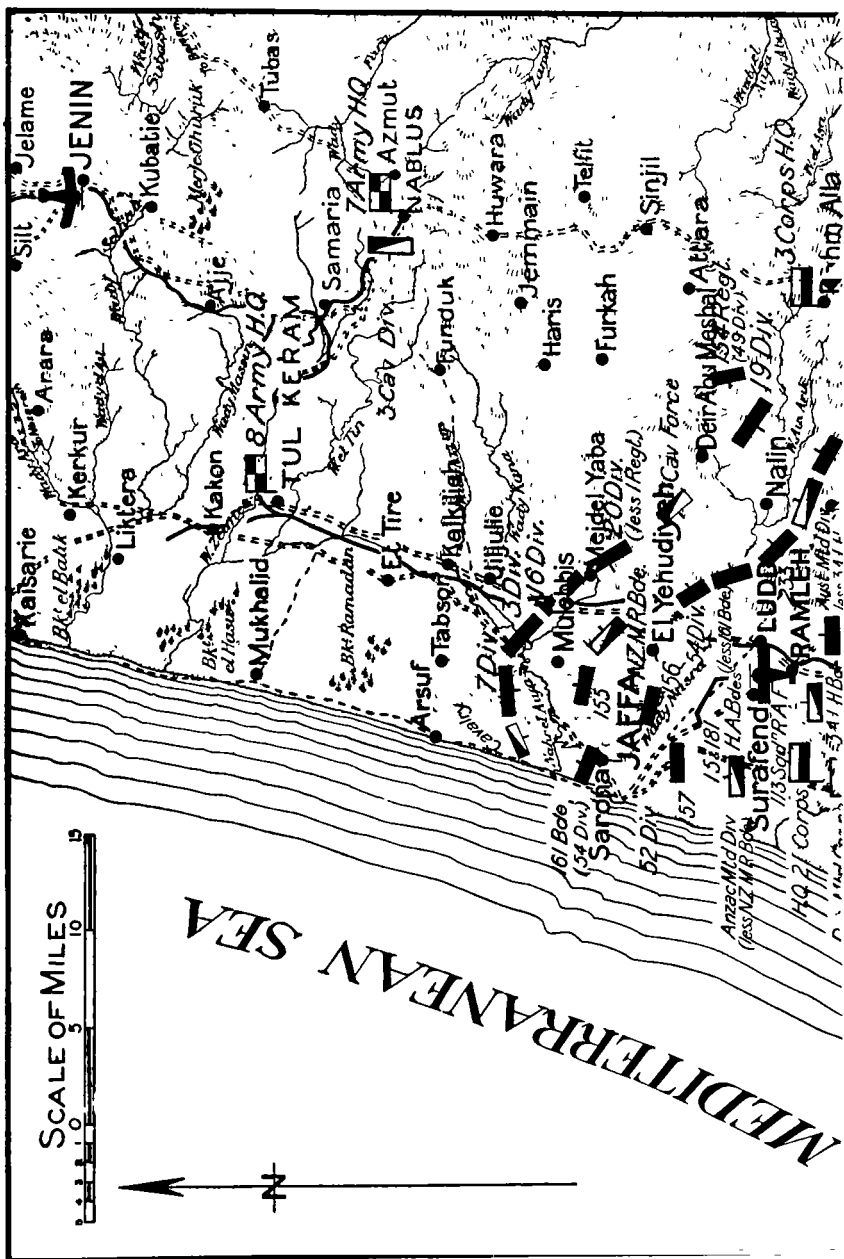
On December 6th the enemy retired slightly in front of the 10th Division on the left, and the British entered Suffa and Khurbet Hellabi, while at the same time the Australian Mounted Division made a little progress. Allenby's final assault was timed for the 8th, when it was expected that the 53rd Division would be able to co-operate from the south and south-east. On the evening of the 7th the Turkish line of defence covered Bethlehem on the south (where it was opposed to Mott), and then, turning north, ran through Ras el Balua, Ain el Hand, Kibriyan, and Kulat el Ghuleh to the west of Ain Karim, and along the high, stony ridge above the Wady es Surar, covering Deir Yesin and Beit Iksa. Next, passing between Nebi Samwil and El Jib, it was carried north-west—touching Et Tireh, Beit ur el Foka, and Khurbet Aberjan—to near Suffa.

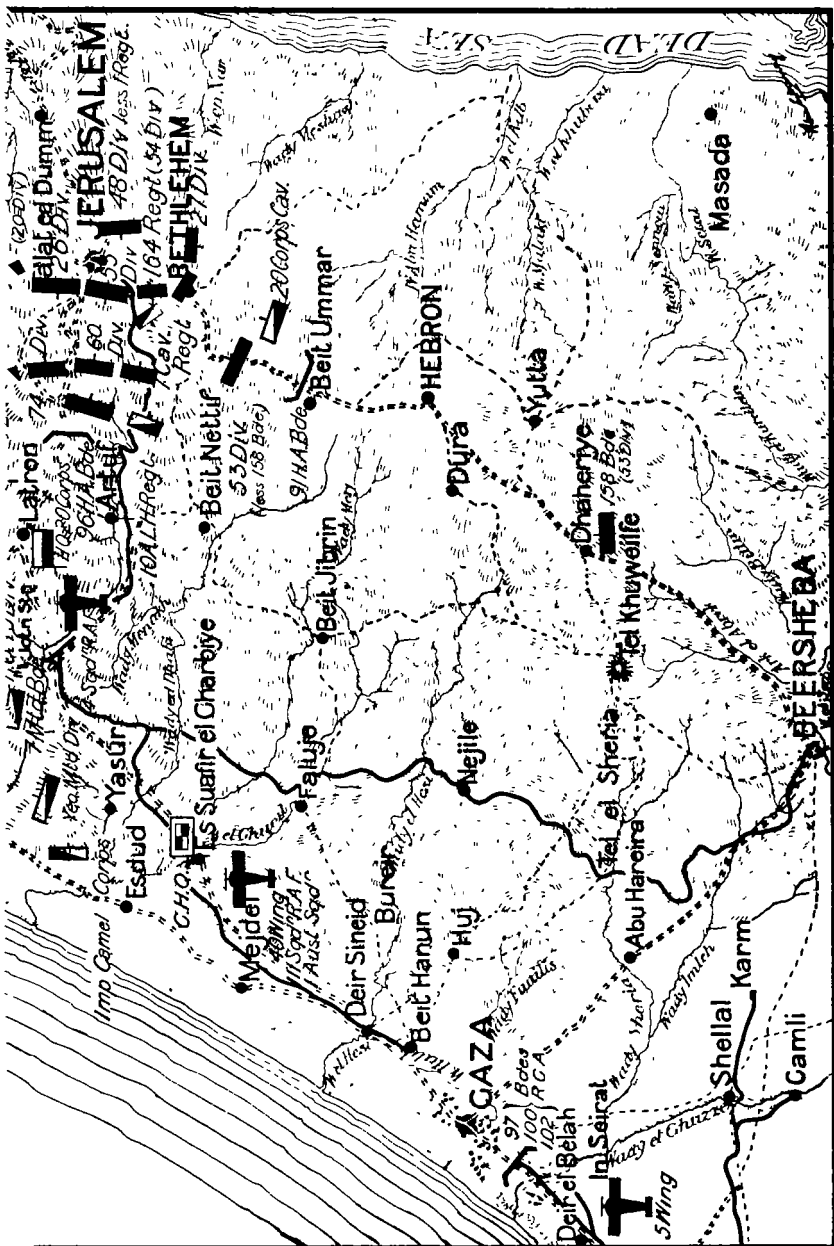
That night rain fell heavily, and the drenched hills sounded with the noise of tumbling flood-waters. Movement in the darkness seemed very precarious; but the British infantry and their regimental officers were now at home in Judæa, and the 179th Brigade of the 60th Division crossed the deep, precipitous gorge of the Wady Surar soon after midnight, and drove the enemy from the heights at Ain Karim. All night the remaining brigades of the 60th and 74th Divisions shivered in the rain, impatiently waiting for the orders that would bring them activity. At 5.15 a.m., after a heavy bombardment by the divisional artillery supplemented by many heavy guns, the whole line moved steadily forward in rain and mist and darkness. The Turk was well placed to meet the assault. His trenches on the long hill east of the deep valley of the Wady Surar had been carefully prepared, and completely dominated the great gorge over which the British were forced to attack. Had the defenders been in good heart and sound fighting trim, they could probably have resisted all attempts to dislodge them. But their state was wretched. For weeks the fighting had gone strongly against them; their last counter-attacks had everywhere failed; and, although they now fought stoutly at some points, their resistance as a whole lacked spirit and confidence. Shaken by the preliminary bombardment, and by wet and cold after the night's rain in sodden, dripping trenches, they yielded before the dashing advance of the two British divisions, and abandoned the greater part of their commanding line on the heights. Two strong points, known as the "Heart" and "Liver" Redoubts, and complicated earthworks at Deir Yesin for some time obstructed the 60th Division, and the main road past Kulonieh and towards the higher ground about the village of Lifta was swept with artillery and machine-guns.

In the early morning the 53rd Division on the right was strongly opposed, and some hours passed before the brigades were able to attack the high ground covering Beit Jala; this delay left open the right flank of the 60th. Further to the left both the Londoners and the 74th Division, despite great endeavour and the frequent use of the bayonet were checked during the afternoon. There are perhaps fifty great defensive positions in the Judæan hill-country, but for adaptability to



MAP





POSITION PRIOR TO FALL OF JERUSALEM, EVENING OF 7TH DECEMBER, 1917.

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measures of resistance the neighbourhood of Jerusalem overshadows them all. Jerusalem was the last of the Canaanite strongholds to bow to Israel; it was again and again, after its capture by David, the fortress from which, when all else was gone, its new possessors defied and often overthrew their foes. And while in ancient days its main strength lay in great walls and in the deep gorges which surround it on three sides, its outer ring of steep hills and deep valleys is still equally strong against the modern invader, despite his powerful long-range machinery of destruction. The gaunt, rocky hillsides, drenched with water, made slow and heavy climbing for the loaded infantrymen, and the ceaseless rain and heavy mists were an insuperable obstacle to perfect contact and co-operation. Before nightfall the attack was suspended, and the advanced line built up, while the 10th Australian Light Horse and a regiment of Worcester Yeomanry—now attached to XX Corps—lightly held the gap between the 60th and 53rd Divisions.

Although the Turks had checked the great British final advance, the loss of their strong trenches above the Wady Surar lost them Jerusalem. But their resistance had been sustained just long enough to save their army from capture and destruction. Early on the morning of the 8th some hundreds of the more prominent Christians of Jerusalem had been ordered to prepare at once to leave the city and tramp with their families to Nablus or Jericho. Even then, therefore, the Turks had accepted the loss of the city, which they knew to be of much moral and political significance to their tottering cause; their opposition to the British on that day was a mere delaying engagement. As night approached, and the British were reported to have passed Lifta, the enemy staff became demoralised; confusion and panic spread rapidly outwards to the men in the trenches, and as darkness fell the Jaffa road was choked with wretched fugitive troops surging in a leaderless mass into Jerusalem. Some officers made efforts to control their units; but they could not stand against affrighted men expecting each moment to be ridden down by the dread horsemen who had so often in the campaign appeared at moments like this.

As they streamed through Jerusalem, the highly-strained

suspense of the Jewish and Christian populace—who day by day had heard louder and louder the roar of the British guns as they advanced up the passes—broke into a tumult of joyous shouts. They rushed from house to house to greet their friends, ran in excitement through the narrow, covered ways of the gloomy bazaars of the old town, and danced out into the more spacious thoroughfares of the new town beyond the walls. But the Turks in the moment of their significant defeat still followed sound military practice; while their infantry was pouring in chaos through the city, their batteries behind maintained a heavy fire on the British lines. This bombardment served a double purpose; it steadied their broken troops and the populace, and deceived the British divisions as to the completeness of the evacuation, which could thus take its course unmolested. That night the 53rd Division, advancing in the darkness, found Bethlehem deserted by the foe, and reached a line about two and a half miles south of Jerusalem; but the 60th and 74th Divisions remained on their ground.

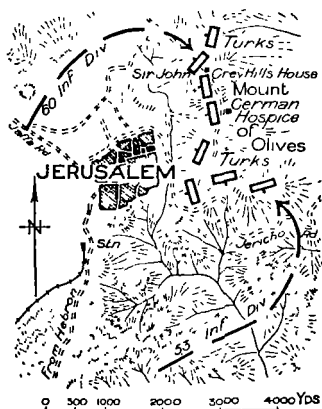
By 7 o'clock on the morning of Sunday, December 9th, the last Turkish soldier had straggled through the city. Izzet Bey, the Governor, fled shortly before dawn by the Jericho road, after smashing with a hammer the instruments at the telegraph office, and handing to the mayor a letter of formal surrender. Soon after sunrise the mayor—a descendant of the Prophet, and a member of the family which traditionally supplied mayors to the Holy City—supported by a few Turkish police bearing two white flags, walked out towards the British at Lifta. There he was met by Sergeant Hurcomb and Sergeant Sedgewick, of the Londoners, who escorted him to some officers of the 302nd Royal Field Artillery Brigade; and Izzet Bey's letter was passed on to General Shea, who was in command of the 60th Division. After communications between Shea, Chetwode, and Allenby, Shea was authorised by the Commander-in-Chief to enter and take the surrender of the city. He went in with a guard of honour supplied by his own muddy Londoners, and in a brief, plain ceremony formally accepted the surrender from the mayor.

But if this ceremony was severely simple in itself, the setting in which it took place teemed with significance and suggestion. British fighting men had for the first time won

Jerusalem; the cradle of Christianity was again in Christian hands; the Jews believed that the city, and all Palestine, was that day secured, not for Christian possession, but for them; the Turks, who had for 400 years blighted the country and exercised tyranny over Christian and Jew alike, were driven out never to return. General Shea was greeted by shouting and almost hysterical crowds, more various in race, religion, and speech than are to be found in any other city in the world. They thronged about the car in the streets leading down through the new town to the Jaffa gate of the old walled city. Filling every window, and densely packed on the flat-roofed houses, they welcomed the little party of Englishmen in a babel of many tongues. All the peoples of the Near East and of the western world were represented—Christian priests and nuns from most of the countries of Europe, Copts from Africa, Jews from every land, a few Englishwomen, a handful of Americans, Syrians, and Armenians. And, mingling with the demonstrative Christians and Jews, sullen and calculating, rejoicing as little in the arrival of the British as they had in the occupation of the Turks, were the Arabs who make up so large a part of the population. In their presence and their aloof, stolid bearing, they stood for the interests of a great people of far more concern to Britain than the Jews or all the persecuted Christians under Turkish rule. They were the representatives of the Moslems of British India and of Egypt, and of many other countries where England's influence is chiefly due to her reputation for religious tolerance and scrupulous impartiality in dealing with peoples of hostile faiths. These silent Arabs served to remind the representatives of the Government in London that Jerusalem is sacred to others beside Christian and Jew; that the Arab race is the parent of both the Hebrew and the Christian faiths; that in a war for the right of self-determination it had the master-claim to all Palestine; and that the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem is one of the most sacred of all Moslem shrines. All the trouble which was to follow after the Armistice in the settlement of the Arab claims was foreshadowed as General Shea drove through the streets of Jerusalem.

While Jerusalem was shouting, the three British divisions were moving swiftly to ensure its safe keeping. By night

the 53rd Division, encircling the city on the east, had fought the Turks off the Jericho road and attacked them on the Mount of Olives. At the same time the 74th wheeled and, with the 60th on its right, skirted the western suburbs of Jerusalem and seized the Nablus road. The Londoners suffered casualties from rifles and machine-guns on the Mount of Olives, from which the Turks, looking across the valley of Jehoshaphat, had a complete view of Jerusalem; but, attacking with the bayonet, the British cleared out the enemy, who left seventy dead on the position, and soon after dark the 60th made touch with the 53rd, and the cordon was complete. On the following day the line was pushed out north and east sufficiently far to deny the enemy observation of the city, and was consolidated against any counter-attack.



Immediately after General Shea's formal entry, British troops appeared in increasing numbers in the new part of the town. Staff officers sought suitable buildings for headquarters, search was made for supplies, and guards were at once placed over the Holy Places. Before nightfall the sloppy, broken road leading up from Latron was crowded with every kind of transport hastening towards Jerusalem. British drivers of caterpillar tractors, motor-lorries, and horse-waggons, and native leaders of endless trains of pack-camels, mules, and donkeys, strained and shouted in the hope of a glimpse of the Holy City before nightfall. The great citadel had fallen, and every man under Allenby's widely scattered command was stirred and elated.

Early in the afternoon Major C. G. Dunckley² rode in at the head of his squadron of the 10th Australian Light Horse, and his men were the first mounted troops and the first Aus-

² Maj C G Dunckley, 10th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Bruce Rock, W. Aust.; b. Leatherhead, Surrey, Eng., 9 Apr., 1885. Died, 5 July, 1924.

tralians to enter. Their first greeting was from a nun who was busy repairing the tiles on the roof of her convent at the edge of the town, and who ceased her task to wave to the light horsemen. As the Western Australians, with their emu plumes stirring in the breeze, rode on through the streets, they were rushed by the populace, who marvelled at the size of their big, long-tailed horses. Accustomed to the slender Arab ponies, the people of Palestine and Syria were always impressed by the height and power of the splendid animals—selected in many parts of the world, but mainly in Australia—which carried the great body of horsemen under Chauvel's command.

The Western Australians, wet, mud-splashed, unshaven, and wearied by their prolonged ordeal in the bleak, shelterless hills, forgot their wretched condition as they pushed slowly forward through the excited citizens. The new town of Jerusalem, lying on the rolling plateau immediately west of the old walled city, is graced by many impressive religious buildings founded by Christians of various countries, and by several imposing white residences set in spacious and luxuriant gardens. As the New Zealanders had rejoiced in the civilisation and comfort of Jaffa, so all the troops who had been fighting and suffering in the hills rejoiced in the material promise of the new town of Jerusalem. But if these spent, chilled, and hungry campaigners thought at the time of their bodily comfort, that was secondary to the spiritual influences which moved them. In all that great army it is doubtful if a single man of European origin entered Jerusalem for the first time untouched by the influence of the Saviour. Christ met each man on the threshold of the city; each man, as he entered, was purified and exalted. The influence was, perhaps, not lasting. War is not a Christian mission. But for a brief spell at least the soldier's mind was purged of grossness, and he knew again the pure and trusting faith of his early childhood.

Soon after Dunckley's entry the rest of the regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Todd, arrived; billets were secured, and that night the men slept in houses for the first time since leaving Australia three years before. A few hours had worked a miraculous change in the city. The Turkish

withdrawal had been complete, and the only representatives of the Ottoman Empire to remain were the civil police. On the night of the 7th, before the last great British assault, Jerusalem had been filled with Turks and Germans, who occupied the best residences for their various staffs, and thronged the shops of the new town and the bazaars of the walled city. The populace, quivering with excitement as the British cannonade drew nearer, were still fearful of some crowning act of horror. On the next night Jews and Christians cowered in their houses, tremulous with fear and joy, as from their windows they watched the beaten and confused masses of Turkish soldiery hastening through the city and departing to Nablus or Jericho. Then, assured of their deliverance, they had emerged and tumultuously rejoiced. And now, on the night of the 9th, with the British in possession and strong lines of infantry pushed out to the north and east, the delirium of the night and day was followed by an atmosphere of profound relief and strange calm. The Eastern mind is amazingly adaptable. Everywhere the shopkeepers were back at their stalls, trading keenly with the hearty British infantry and the casual Australian horsemen, who were spending their money with the delight of children in the week before Christmas. The dim lights of shops and stalls showed up the forms of Tommies in their steel helmets and shorts, and Australians in their slouch hats and feathers, muddy leggings, and rusted spurs. Outside each stall was a circle of curious, polyglot people, of all races, shades, and faiths—miserable-looking Jewish men, great-coated to their heels, in wide-brimmed black hats, with uncut hair and locks falling before their ears; pretty, dark-eyed girls; swarms of dirty, merry children; Syrians in western dress; an occasional sombre Greek priest, impressive with his long, jet-black beard, black cap, and simple dark cloak; an occasional peasant in sheepskins and rags, yet with that grace and dignity of bearing which distinguishes the meanest Arab, and recalling popular pictures of John the Baptist; and Arabs of richer dress, quiet and reserved, speculating about the meaning for them and their race of their swift change from one enemy possession to another. But the soldiers, both British and Australian, were indifferent to all the scrutiny, as they bargained for wine

and bread, raisins and tobacco and cigarettes, and any other foodstuffs and simple luxuries that offered.

That night, for the first time since the outbreak of the war, Jerusalem slept calmly. The dread under which Christians and Jews had lived for three years had vanished. But, in fairness to both Turks and Germans, it should be recorded that nowhere during the advance to Jerusalem, or later during that into Syria, did the non-Moslem inhabitants suffer any of the atrocities practised in Asia Minor upon Armenians, and, to a less degree, upon Greeks. There were many examples of individual harshness; but nowhere was there wholesale massacre, outraging of women, or confiscation of property. The nightmare of anxiety in which the people had lived at Jerusalem and elsewhere was due not to the brutal behaviour of the Turks in their midst, but to the fear that one day they might be treated as the Armenians had been treated farther north.

On December 10th, while the infantry positions were being firmly established, the light horsemen pushed out for about eight miles along the Nablus road, where the heavy shell-fire which they drew showed that the Turks were disposed to limit Allenby's great military and moral victory as narrowly as possible to Jerusalem. There was evidence, too, that they were holding out towards the southern end of the Jordan valley. If they could block Allenby there, they would deny him access across the river to the Hejaz railway, and make further activity on his right flank extremely difficult.

During the day the British Military Governor of Jerusalem reached the city, and the transfer and re-organisation of the civil administration was at once entered upon. When captured, Jerusalem was by no means destitute. Despite all their transport difficulties, the Turks had enabled the civil population to draw supplies from Nablus and from the districts east of Jordan. The city possessed an abundance of coarse flour, dried fruits, wine, and tobacco, and the shopkeepers were for a few days able to sell freely to thousands of British soldiers. Even shops which traded in clothing, hardware, and books had large stocks (many of them of German origin) which gave the lie—as did so many other discoveries during the long advance—to the stories freely

circulated among the Allies of the desperate economic plight of the Central Powers. Another remarkable and welcome surprise was the charges made by the shopkeepers. The prices which had ruled at Jerusalem during the war were retained, and were below those prevailing at that time in Cairo. Apparently the Germans had a sounder hold upon the unprincipled trader than the British. One anomaly, however, was noticed by the troops, and remembered against the Jews of the Philistine plain, who had been so demonstrative in their welcome to Chauvel's mounted troops. Richon wines could be bought in Jerusalem, despite the long road transport, at lower prices than the Jews of Richon had charged in the village itself. The Jerusalem shopkeepers were quick to exploit the slackness of the British administration in regard to trading, and its policy of truckling excessively to the susceptibilities of the people of occupied enemy territory. Prices rose rapidly against the needy British soldiers. When, after the Turkish evacuation, supplies from the north and east were cut off, Jerusalem was soon faced by shortage; but this was quickly met by the organisation of British supply columns from the Mediterranean for the civil population. The responsibilities of a commander-in-chief and his staff in a war of conquest extend far beyond actual military operations.

If Jerusalem at the time of its capture presented no striking evidence of poverty, it was found in an indescribable state of filth. Excessively crowded and undrained, and with most of its main thoroughfares covered and therefore unpurified by the sun, the old city had been for centuries one of the most nauseating and verminous areas in the world; and even the open and pretentious new town beyond the walls was scarcely less revolting to the senses. To the habitual uncleanness of a lazy, unproductive, parasitical people—most of them living by a traffic in manufactured holy relics and shoddy souvenirs, and by the general prostitution of religion to tourists of three faiths and many races—had for three years been added the primitive habits of the Turkish soldiery. So offensive was Jerusalem that even the most ardent Christians in the army who visited it at that time remembered that visit with feelings of horror. A Christian nation, they thought, was justified in the conquest of Palestine, if only on

the ground that the cradle and inspiration of its faith should be cleansed and made physically wholesome and fragrant.

General Allenby formally entered Jerusalem on December 11th. No attempt was made to impress the pageant-loving Eastern mind with the pomp and power of the conquerors. When the German Emperor William visited the Holy City in 1908, his entry was marked by a melodramatic show of splendour; and, although the world smiled at the Kaiser's characteristic behaviour, that demonstration made an enduring impression upon the people of Palestine and Syria, and even upon the Turks. But now that cleverly-built prestige was shattered. Allenby, not unmindful, perhaps, of the bombastic pageantry of nine years earlier, ordered a ceremony marked by severe plainness and simplicity. Ignoring the wide, massive gateway which had been driven through the great stone walls to permit the Emperor to move in state into the Holy City, he elected to go in on foot by the side entrance of the narrow old Jaffa gate.

Flanking the Jaffa road, through the new town to the gateway, were small detachments of troops representative of the British Army, not dressed as for ceremonial parade, but in fighting trim, with the mud of the hills on their ragged clothes, the lines on their faces and the hollows about their eyes telling of the long-sustained strain of marching and battle. Shoulder to shoulder stood Scots in Tam o' Shanter, New Zealanders who had ridden hard from Jaffa so that the Dominion should be represented, Australians under Captain H. V. H. Throssell,^a an Anzac V.C., little stolid Gurkhas, and many more, to tell of the boundless range of the British Empire and its fighting men. Twenty-three times before had Jerusalem opened its gates to the conqueror; but not even Imperial Rome had been able to bring to the assault an army as rich and diverse in its imperialism as that which had now won the city for Britain. The only touch of colour in the troops was introduced by the detachment of French infantry in their pale-blue uniforms, and by a body of picturesque Bersaglieri representing Italy. Neither the French nor the Italians had, so far, taken any part in the fighting. They

^a Capt. H V H. Throssell, V C. 10th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Cowcowing, W. Aust; b Northam, W. Aust., 27 Oct., 1884. Died, 19 Nov., 1933.

were merely present in Palestine for diplomatic reasons, and their clear, fresh appearance was in sharp contrast to the war-worn British. America was represented by Major Edward Davis, the military attaché of the United States.

Crowding and jostling behind the lines of Allied troops, waited the expectant medley of races which made up the strange population, and every wall and housetop was covered with the multitude. Dressed chiefly in cheap cottons of many crude colours, the crowds gave no suggestion of wealth or splendour; for Jerusalem, apart from a few of its religious establishments, is not a city of riches. But their colours and their excitement introduced a note of carnival and gaiety to the grey stone walls of the old city, and to the dirty white buildings along the Jaffa road. The Commander-in-Chief rode his charger until he came to the lane of the fighting men; there dismounting, he advanced briskly on foot. By arrangement with the Allies, the Union Jack was not flown anywhere in Palestine or Syria; so, attended by neither flag nor triumphal band, Allenby walked in, accompanied by representatives of the Allies and followed by his staff, as he would have on any inspection of troops in the field. Rifle-buts rang on the pavement as the detachments completed the salute, and the crowds cheered in a nervous, uncertain manner in many languages. But there was no demonstration of armed force by the conquerors, no deep-throated roar from the people. Near the entrance to the Jaffa gate the Commander-in-Chief was received by the Military Governor; then he entered the old gate or doorway, and proceeded to the terrace of the ancient citadel near the Tower of David. There a proclamation was read in English, French, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Russian, placing the city under martial law as long as should be necessary, but at the same time promising the citizens full facilities for lawful business and protection for all sacred places and institutions. Other leaders might have been tempted to introduce some show of ostentation; but Allenby was by disposition a downright man and a plain dealer, always intolerant of unnecessary show on active service. As the proclamation was read by representatives of the various nationalities and races, he was obviously impatient at the wearisome but necessary repetition; and a few minutes

later, when all the religious and civic notables were introduced to him in turn, he was again ill at ease and anxious to get back to the prosecution of his still incomplete military task.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SEASONED LIGHT HORSEMEN

IN Palestine and Syria the rainfall is singular in its regularity. Already the British operations had been sorely hampered by the early downpour of late November and early December; but the High Command knew that, unless the season was abnormal, still heavier "latter rains" were to be reckoned with at about the close of the year. Allenby's progress had been very gratifying. If the bulk of the Turkish armies had escaped destruction, they were disorganised and disheartened, and Jerusalem was won. But there must be more fighting, and at once, if he was to regard the future with satisfaction. His line as it stood, from the south of the Nahr Auja on the coast to the immediate north of Jerusalem, was but a poor jumping-off place for any resumption of a general offensive; he therefore determined to continue his advance before the Turks had time to revive their shattered condition, and to fortify strongly the ground he now held. On the coast the Turks must be driven from the high ground north of the Auja, and so deprived of opportunity to build up there a formidable barrier; in the hills they must be pushed north from Judæa into the softer country of Samaria, which would give him an opening for his contemplated thrust at the Jordan valley. While preparations were being made for the two advances, many thousands of Egyptian labourers were set to work on the Jaffa-Jerusalem road through the hills, and their efforts were supplemented by the labour of the men, women and children of the Arab villages. The local Arabs worked by contract. Every hillside close to the road was gay with their coloured rags as they rolled and carried down stones to the highway, and they added still another strange element to the medley of races which made up the British command. In a few days the road was sound from end to end, and the problem of supplying the troops about Jerusalem was for the time solved.

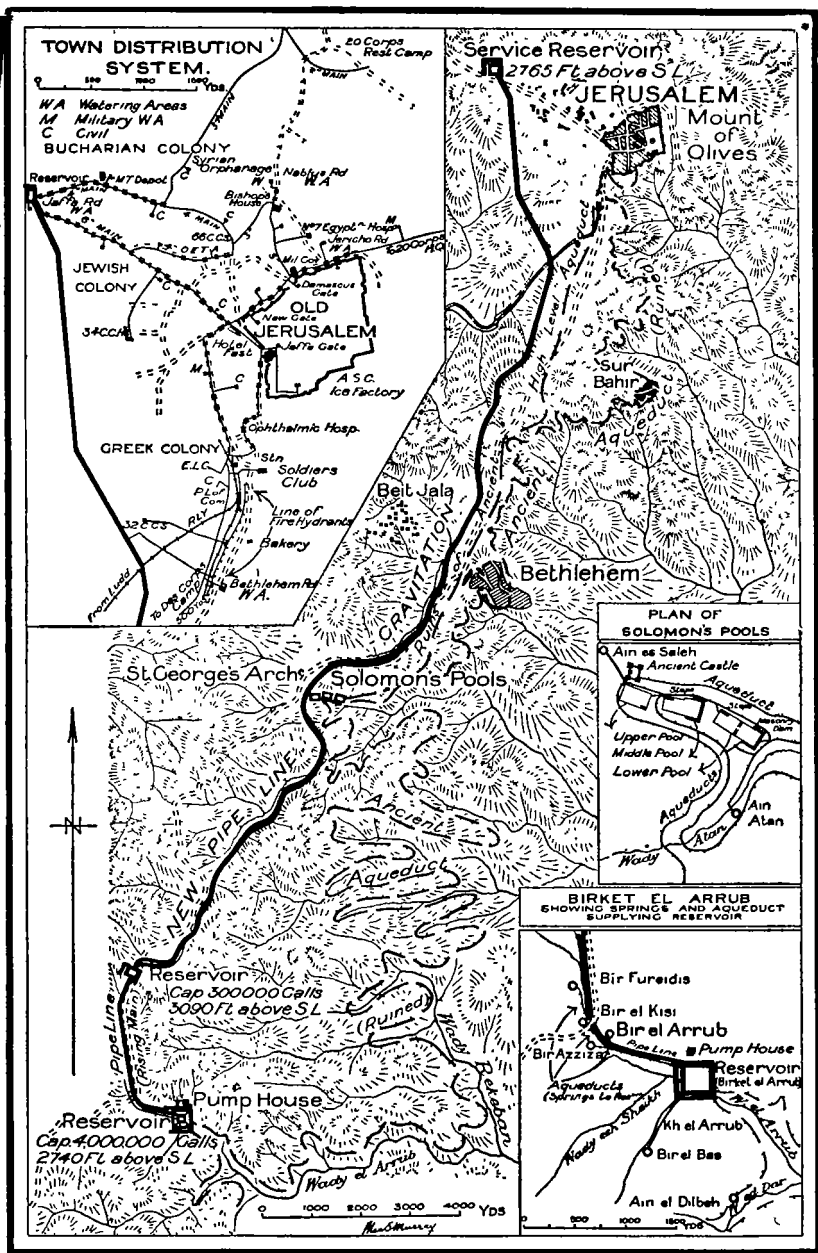
After driving back the few companies of British infantry and the New Zealanders from the north bank of the Nahr Auja in November, the Turks had worked at high pressure to

resist another British advance. Their line crossed the Auja at Khurbet Hadrah, controlled Bald Hill, and ran towards the east about a mile south of Mulebbis. Major-General Hill, commanding the 52nd Division of Lowlanders, who held the opposing British sector, decided upon a surprise passage of the Auja by night. The stream was some forty yards wide and several feet deep, and its steep banks made the launching of boats or pontoons very difficult. In the orange-groves north of Jaffa, which less than a year later were to shelter Chauvel's mounted divisions before the great ride to Aleppo, the British engineers assembled a number of pontoons; they also constructed a large number of canvas coracles, each capable of carrying twenty men. Three days' heavy rain flooded the south side of the river-valley, delayed the attempt, and added greatly to the task before the troops. But on the night of the 20th, the pontoons and coracles were carried in silence over the wet, heavy ground, and the first men made the passage. Many of the coracles collapsed; but the Lowlanders, joining hands, waded across breast-deep in water, quickly formed up, and in silence rushed the trenches above the river with the bayonet. The enemy was completely surprised. Sheikh Muannis and Khurbet Hadrah were impetuously and successfully stormed, and by dawn a line from Hadrah to Tel el Rekkeit, about two miles north of the Auja, was securely held. Next day the British position was reinforced and consolidated; on the right Bald Hill was captured by the 54th Division, and the Turks were compelled to evacuate Mulebbis and Fejja. A further thrust on the coast, in which the navy co-operated from the sea, carried the British advance up to a line drawn from Tel el Mukhmar (at the junction of the Wady Ishkar with the Auja) on the right through Sheikh el Ballutah to the sea-cliffs at Arsuf, some ten miles north of Jaffa. This brilliant operation, which served to demonstrate again the splendid fighting efficiency of the British infantry at that time, made Jaffa safe as a port for the landing of supplies, and forced the Turks from their strong line on the Auja back to an inferior defensive position. Allenby was already laying the foundations for his next and final advance.

Later in December the advance of the 60th, 74th, and 10th Divisions to the north of Jerusalem was equally dashing and

sure. Half an hour before midnight on the 26th the Turks had launched a spirited offensive astride the Nablus road for the recapture of Jerusalem. The vigour of this advance was a fine tribute to the fighting powers of the battered enemy. Assaulting with great determination, the Turks swept over the outposts of the Londoners close to the road and at the same time violently assaulted the line of the 53rd Division, east of Jerusalem. But the British infantry was at that time morally and physically in the ascendant. Again and again enemy waves rushed up to the sangars and trenches of the Londoners and the Welshmen, only to be cut down and broken by steady and galling fire; and after severe losses the adventure was abandoned. At noon the 74th and 10th Divisions counter-attacked against the enemy's right flank and, gaining ground rapidly, dislocated his line. Allenby was quick to exploit the promising position, and on the 28th the whole corps swung forward with the bayonet. The Turk, favoured all the way by the mountains, fought stubbornly; but nowhere was he able to withstand the clever staff-work and the sweeping onslaught of the British infantrymen, who, now flushed with repeated victories, drove in fearlessly. In this fighting the Turks left 750 prisoners in British hands, and upwards of 1,000 of their dead were buried. By the end of the month the XX Corps occupied a line from Deir Ibn Obeid, south-east of Jerusalem, northwards past Hizme to Beitin and on to the west, passing about twelve miles north of Jerusalem, through El Burj and Ras Kerker, to Deir el Kuddis. The 74th and 10th Divisions, the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade, and the 75th Division carried the front west and north-west across Samaria towards the Sharon sectors held by the 54th and 52nd.

The light horsemen of the Australian Mounted Division had assisted in this advance by vigorous reconnaissance, but had not been closely engaged. As they went forward, the country improved. Firewood was found for cooking; bivouac sheets, extra blankets, and improved rations were issued, and even rum reached the extreme outposts in the hills. Towards Christmas funds were raised, and additional cigarettes, tobacco, sweets, and slight luxuries, such as shaving soap and tooth-paste, were secured. The little packets which reached the troops would have excited scanty interest in days of peace,



JERUSALEM WATER SUPPLY AFTER THE BRITISH OCCUPATION. (See p. 648.)

but these lonely simple fighting men on the hills hailed them with unfeigned delight. A Christian church in a neighbouring village pealed merrily, and the men sang carols round their camp-fires; if their hearts were heavy with yearning, they made a brave showing.

Early in January the Australian Mounted Division was withdrawn to its old camping-ground on the sand-hills at Belah. With the exception of the 2nd Regiment (of Anzac Mounted Division), which was sent to hold the sector in the hills from which the 4th Brigade had been withdrawn, all the light horsemen were now out of the line. The 1st Brigade had been for some time at Richon and the 2nd at Wady Hanein, and the men always recalled with gratitude those pleasant Jewish settlements with their groves of large golden oranges, their supplies of wine, and their warm-hearted people. If the Jews sometimes charged extortionate prices, the Australians remembered the lean years through which the villagers had passed, when the loss of their horses and vehicles and the general unrest had restricted production and markets. And the Jews, profoundly thankful for their deliverance from the Turks, who had tolerated but never welcomed their presence, and seeing in the British occupation the end of their exploitation by lawless Arabs, were aroused to ecstasy by the capture of Jerusalem. The world-wide dream of a Jewish nation established once more in Palestine, which had for nearly 2,000 years sustained their scattered race, seemed already a reality; and in their joy they showered hospitality upon the staff officers billeted in their houses and upon the troops encamped on the surrounding sand-hills. General Chauvel, who had his Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters at Deiran, was embarrassed with their simple honours, and officers were freely invited to strange formal afternoon and evening parties, where, in consequence of the language-barrier, there was very little speech, but much sipping of wine and feasting on raisins and oranges and sweet-meats.

At Wady Hanein General Ryrice and all the officers of the brigade were entertained at a feast and dance, to mark the deliverance of the Holy City. The senior officers and village elders were placed at a large central table, while the matrons

were seated along one side of the hall and the maidens along the other, with the junior officers and the young men of the village standing grouped at one end. An impassioned speech in Russian was made by the village schoolmaster, whose oratory—except for references to Cromwell, Byron, and Gladstone as apostles of international freedom—was quite lost upon the light horsemen. Then Ryrie, an old parliamentarian and a bluff, hearty speaker, responded; and so emphatic and impressive was he that the elderly matrons, although they knew not a word of English, wept for joy. Afterwards the young Australians led out the Jewish girls to dance, and, if the conversation was scanty, eyes were eloquent. On Sunday afternoons the villagers in their best dresses would visit the camps and take tea with the Australians; and after the lonely harsh life of the country behind, the contact with family life and women and little children made those days the happiest the light horsemen had known since they landed in Egypt. The 2nd Brigade camped a number of times at Wady Hanein in the following year, and the 1st Brigade and the New Zealanders at Richon. Many warm friendships were founded, and, as the horsemen marched out for action, the troubled Jews would follow them with their blessings and tears.

Towards the end of December the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades moved further south to camp near Esdud. Torrential rains, overflowing wadys, and the deep, heavy mud of the plains had for the time made further operations impossible. To eliminate transport wherever practicable, all mounted troops were withdrawn and based on the railway. Their camps, placed on the sand-hills just clear of the soaked, dark soil of the plain, provided dry and clean lines for the men and horses; and, although a season of winds of almost hurricane force made life in the little canvas bivouacs somewhat sporting and uncertain, the men, now expert at makeshifts, were on the whole snug, well-fed, and happy. As the rains continued, wide areas of the plain were covered with slowly-moving brown floods; the railway bridge over the Wady Ghuzze was washed away and out of action for several days; the great dump at the railhead at Esdud was a standing sheet of water two feet deep. The engineers and supply and transport services were called upon for all their energy and resource to

maintain the infantry divisions to the north. Motor-traffic was suspended, and the drivers of horse-transport spent most of their days and nights digging their waggons out of the mud. As in the assault upon Jerusalem, the donkeys and camels again saved the situation, and Allenby was enabled to feed his men and maintain his advanced positions.

The spirit and appearance of the Australian light horsemen at this time was deeply interesting to the observer. Three years of camp and battle had served to emphasise the strength and distinctiveness of their Australian quality. At the end of 1917 they were in appearance and bearing more like young Australian countrymen of the days before the war than they were when first they landed in Egypt. The self-consciousness, the stiff and awkward endeavour to conform to military conventions in carriage and movement, the regular shape of their new uniforms, and many other factors which then disguised their true appearance and personality, had now vanished. Each man, exercising his commonsense, had discarded all those things which in his opinion were non-essential to high efficiency in war. They had made great concessions; but during the campaign they had with their strong will re-cast the rigid rules of the British Regular Army in a peculiarly Australian mould.

A stranger visiting the light horsemen in these winter camps in the sand-hills would at first sight probably have denied them great qualities as campaigners. Careless of appearances, clinging doggedly, as many comfort-loving men do in civil life, to old hats and old clothes, their leggings and boots usually strangers to polish, they moved through their lines with the slouching gait of Australian countrymen at home, who from their childhood never voluntarily walk except to round up the horse which has to carry them. Their big hats, once trim and turned up at the side, were now worn with the rim down all round, and were battered into the quality and appearance of old pliable felts. They saluted their commanding officer and the brigadier; but only recent reinforcements or ambitious non-commissioned officers wasted such courtesies on officers outside their units.

A first impression would not have been favourable. But no stranger would have been satisfied with that first impres-

sion. He would have been puzzled by the satisfied manner in which the very convincing personalities, who as regimental and squadron leaders commanded these men, accepted their casual, unsoldierly camp-bearing. And then, probing a little deeper, he would have found the campaigning qualities of the light horsemen. He would have been impressed with the condition of the horses after their long, hard-ridden advance on short water and rations; with the singular absence of sore backs; and, comparing them with the yeomanry brigades, with the very small proportion of horses evacuated during the past two months for causes other than battle-casualties and accidents. If the stranger had gone out some morning with these tired-looking Australians to the rifle-range, he would, if a rifleman, have been delighted at the exceptional and easy mastery of the weapon, and at the deadly accuracy of the shooting.

Nothing delighted the Australian more than to demonstrate occasionally that he could, if he wished, excel in the ceremonial side of the service. On days of formal parades, as when the Duke of Connaught visited Palestine early in 1918, the light horse brigades turned out in trim which a Life Guards officer would have commended; and they could, on occasion, present arms with the snap and automatic precision of a 1914 battalion of Grenadiers. At about the same time, when a sports meeting was being arranged by the Australian Mounted Division, a colonel of the 5th Mounted Brigade suggested at an officers' meeting that, as the Australians were not keen on excessive polish, the usual competition for the smartest regimental transport should be dropped. Todd, of the 10th Australian Light Horse, protested. "Not at all," he said: "we will have the competition, and my fellows will win it." And the Western Australians did.

But to appreciate fully the quality of the light horseman he had to be seen in action. These seemingly careless, happy-go-lucky men of the camps were scarcely recognisable after the moment when orders came to pack up and move against the enemy. There was then an almost miraculous note of expectant eagerness, an implicit obedience and absolute discipline, a flinging aside by each man of his strongly defined individualism and a pooling with troop and squadron and regiment, which were astonishing to witness. Most remarkable of all,

perhaps, was the easy and natural assertion of leadership by every junior and senior officer. In no force was there ever a happier association between officers and men. As compared with France, the relatively low casualties permitted the growth and maintenance of close personal association among all ranks. Each regimental leader knew all his men by sight, and most of them by name; many were his personal friends. Every regiment was, in brief, a great happy family. There was a complete absence of that wide gulf which separated British leaders from the men in the ranks. Light horse officers and men were drawn from the same class. Both came chiefly from the farmers and the squatters; and while boys from the "great public schools" were common among the troopers, many men of very little learning in boyhood were trusted and distinguished leaders.

The relationship was a completely happy one, and the force owed its efficiency very largely to the admirable system which governed promotions. As the war continued, every leader from troop to brigade was proved by his work and trusted by those he led. Up to the end of 1917 promotions to commissioned rank were made in the field, and in the light horse there was no lack of non-commissioned officers capable of at once taking over the command of troops and leading them efficiently. During the advance in November and December many men received their commissions in this way. But the system had its obvious disadvantages, as it imposed much strain and embarrassment on both the troops and the new officers. Early in 1918, therefore, the Commander-in-Chief established training-schools for all cadets at Zeitoun, near Cairo, to which candidates who had proved themselves in action were withdrawn for three months; returning after the break, they found it easier to assert their authority than if they had lived on an equal footing with their men up to the moment of their promotion.

The light horse officers, too, set an example to Australian leaders for all time by the manner of their life in the field. They lived as their men lived. Each had his batman and, in camps out of the firing-line, a little more room in his tent than the men had in their "bivvies"; they had also the privilege, denied to the men, of buying spirits when they were available.

But even out of action the officers' messes were marked by the severest simplicity, and, as good personal servants were scarce among the independent light horsemen, they seldom fared better than the troopers in the lines—often not so well.

It might perhaps have been expected that three years of warfare would have drawn the troops of the Mother Country and the Dominions very close together. But, with some notable exceptions, it was remarkable how the fighting men of the old and new lands held aloof. Early in the campaign the Australians became sworn friends with the British artillerymen of the batteries attached to the light horse brigades. Serving together in many hard and critical fights, they developed a strong friendship based first on appreciation and afterwards on affection. The British applauded the dash, the cunning, and the tenacity of the Australians; the light horsemen always went forward confident that all the support which could be given by bold driving, galloping advances to exposed ground close to the enemy, and straight shooting, would be given always by the Territorial gunners. But still there was a strange absence of close fraternity between the men of the two arms. The gunners were never constant attendants at the Australian camp-fires, nor were the Australians regular visitors to the artillery lines. The relationship could not have been more cordial, and the failure to mingle more freely was due simply to the lack of any common intimate interests beyond the war. Between the light horse and the British yeomanry the lack of fraternity was still more noticeable.

But if the Australians failed to make close friends of the British yeomanry, or to give them their due in the later work of the campaign, they became the admirers and champions of the infantry, especially the Lowlanders of the 52nd and the Londoners of the 60th. This fine feeling, which was fully returned by the infantry, was based mainly on performance in battle; but in some measure the preference for the Scots and the Cockneys was due to similarity in personality. On all the war fronts Australians and Scots were close friends. Not only were both great fighters, but they shared the same strong habits of independent thought, the grasping of the essential things in their military training and bearing, and their frank dislike for time-honoured, purposeless formalities

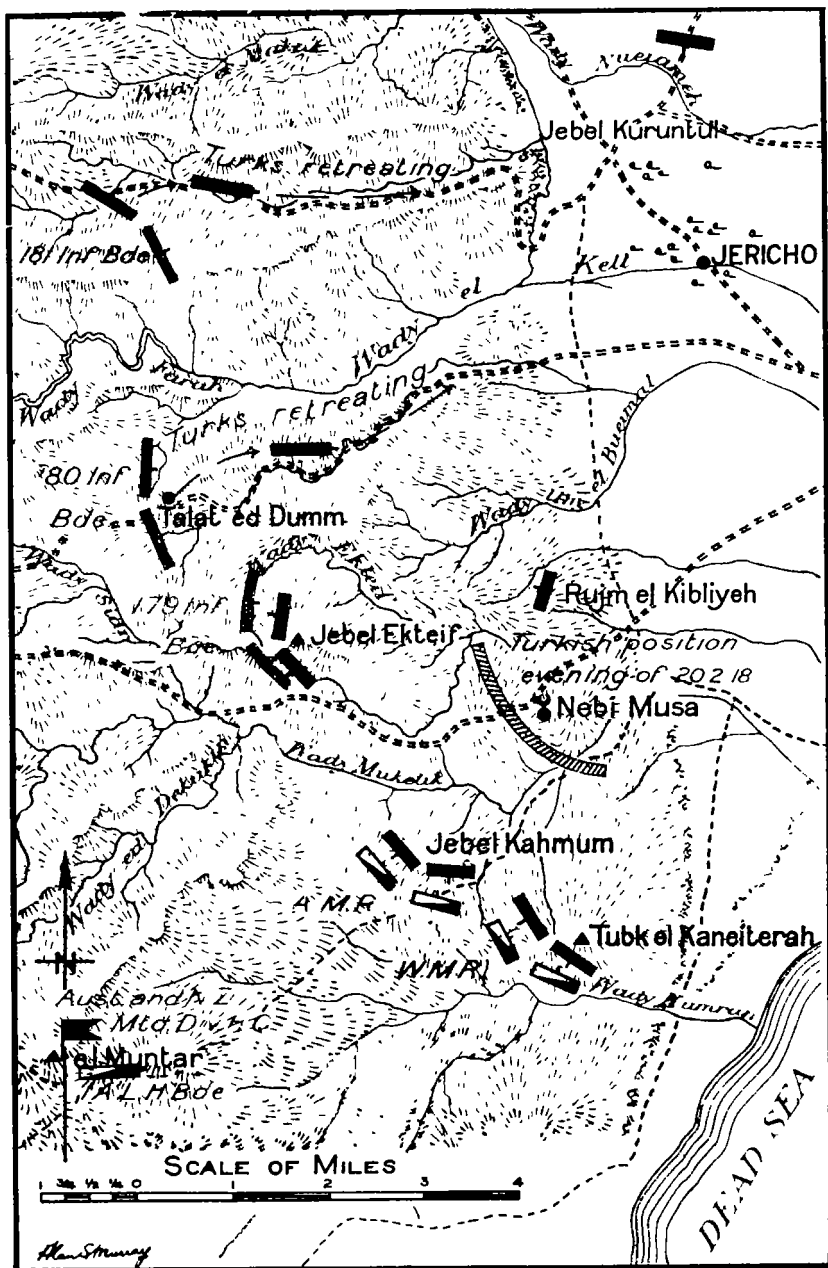
Meanwhile the Londoner, if less bold in his outlook than the Scot, and more conventional in his respect for everything that was stamped with authority, was far ahead of all other English troops in his multiplicity of interests, the breadth and warmth of his sympathies, and his cheeriness under all sorts of hard and depressing conditions; while he was second to none in his sense of humour, in his pugnacious, self-sacrificing courage, his liking for the use of the bayonet—the supreme test of infantry—and his insistence. The Londoner lived and fought in the war as though moved by the consciousness that he was a citizen of the strong heart of the Empire, where most of Britain's great Imperial qualities have their spring; and he proudly lived up to his heritage. Weight for weight, the little Cockney was one of the greatest infantrymen of the whole war. His work at Sheria, in Judæa, at Amman and Shunet Nimrin, will never grow old in the memory of the Australian Light Horse.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE ADVANCE TO JERICHO

By the middle of February, 1918, Allenby was ready to execute his plans for occupying the western side of the Jordan valley from the Dead Sea to the Wady el Auja. The operation was entrusted to Chetwode, commanding XX Corps. The winter rains had temporarily ceased; the thousands of Egyptian and native labourers, employed on the main road to Jerusalem and the side-tracks on the hills, had made possible an active revival of transport in the forward areas; while the advance of the broad-gauge railway, the repair and improvement of the old Turkish lines, and the landing of stores at the mouth of the Wady Sukereir and at Jaffa steadily increased the flow of supplies from the bases in Egypt. With the approach of spring and fine weather, Allenby could contemplate without misgiving the maintenance of a substantial force in the Jordan valley, and even, if necessary, the provision of supplies for great raiding parties east of the river.

On February 18th the British line from west to east crossed the Nablus road a few miles north of Bireh. About five miles east of the road it turned sharply south past Burka, and through Hizme to the Jericho road at Ras Arkub es Suffa; thence, about three miles from Jerusalem, it extended southwards to Khurbet Deir Ibn Obeid. The 60th Division held the line from Obeid to Burka, with the 53rd on its left. In the descent upon the valley the Londoners, assisted by one brigade of the 74th Division, were to advance roughly astride the Jericho road, while the Anzac Mounted Division (less the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade), moving from Bethlehem, was to press down through the hills on the right of the infantry, and enter the great gorge close to the Dead Sea. It was hoped that the Australians and New Zealanders would outflank the left of any Turkish force opposing the advance down the Jericho road, and, by a rapid advance to the north after gaining the valley, and by capturing Jericho, would menace the enemy's communications and line of retreat. The



ADVANCE ON JERICHO—POSITION AT NOON, 20TH FEBRUARY, 1918.



THE ADVANCE UPON JERICHO BY THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE

First Hand Museum Official Photo No B1468

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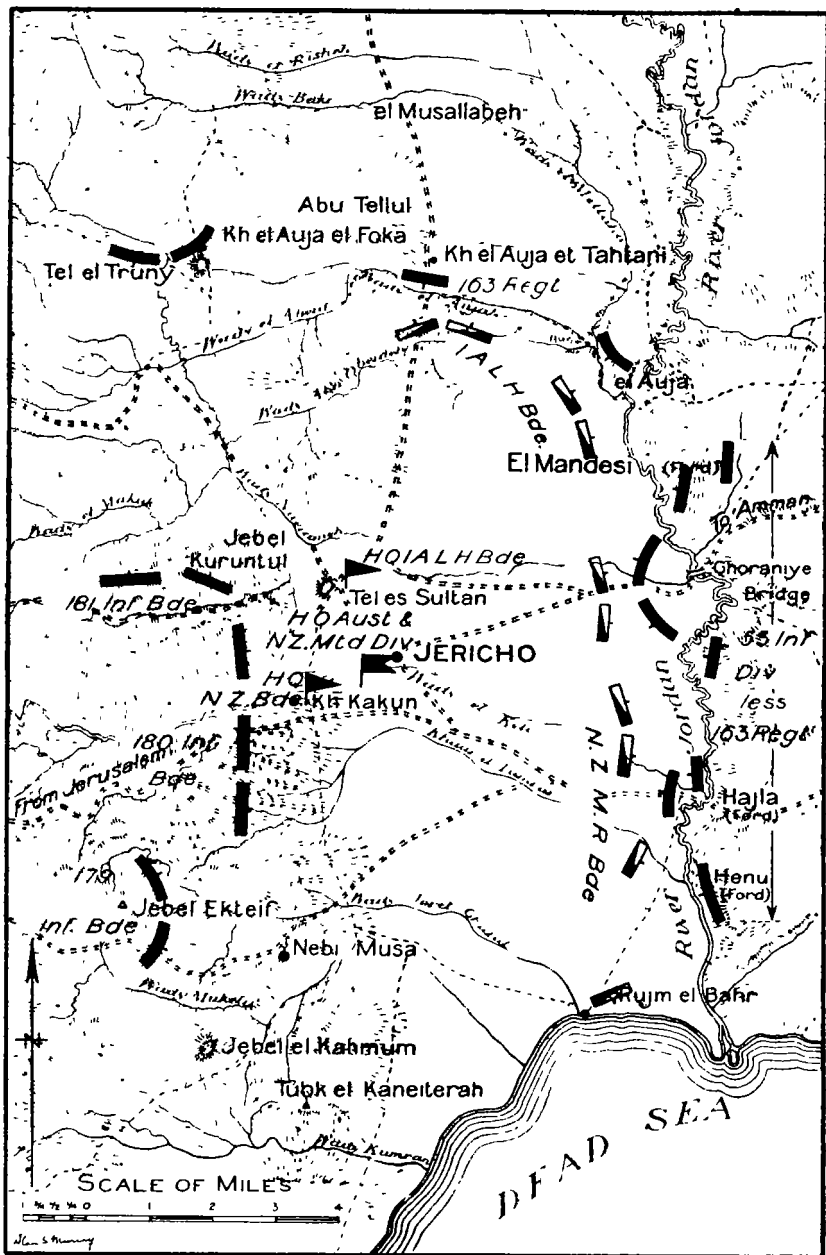


JERICHO.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B38

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Map No. 25



CAPTURE OF JERICHO—POSITION ON 21ST FEBRUARY, 1918, AFTER
TURKS HAD EVACUATED THE TOWN.

53rd Division, pushing north-west, was to cover the left flank of the advancing Londoners.

In all the harsh highlands of Palestine there is no area so forbidding as the country to be covered in this advance. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho follows narrow valleys and precarious mountain side-tracks through the Wilderness of Judah. The Mediterranean aspect of the ranges of western Palestine is bare and rocky; but it is softened by occasional stunted olive-trees in the valleys, by scattered patches of vines and crops on the sides of the hills, and by the remains of thousands of little terraces, which tell of an ancient fertility. But after crossing the watershed, the scene—except for a few weeks in the early spring, when brilliant wild flowers peeping among the grey rocks lend a fleeting beauty to the ranges—is one of sheer desolation. East and north-east of Jerusalem, the wild jumble of steep and rocky hills is for eight months of the year a gaunt place of fierce heat, strong winds, and blinding dust-storms, giving sustenance to neither man nor beast, except around its widely-scattered springs, where a lonely monastery may be located or a few wretched Bedouins kept alive. The only useful highway traversing the Wilderness, and linking the Dead Sea and the southern end of the Jordan valley with Jerusalem and the Mediterranean, is the metalled road leading down to Jericho. This road had during the war been much improved by the enemy; German engineers, by a fine example of grading at the Jordan valley end, had built a new section, which, branching off from the old Jericho road near Talat ed Dumm, made horse- and motor-transport to and from the valley a matter of no great difficulty.

The enemy in this quarter concentrated his defensive works on the Jericho road, and held but lightly the rough country north and south. Away from the road, troops moving east must wind their way through involved narrow gorges, where mounted men would be compelled to lead their horses over loose boulders and wide slippery patches of rocky outcrop. Guns and other wheeled vehicles must follow the road; off the highway even camel-transport would be constantly in danger. The Turks appeared to be satisfied that, if they could block the road, their flank would be safe in the

wilderness on either side. They were handicapped, also, by uncertainty as to Allenby's next line of advance. In the centre the British were within striking distance of Nablus; on the plain of Sharon they might by a strong thrust reach the old Wady esh Shair ("Vale of Barley"), which leads up to Nablus from Tul Keram. The enemy force on the Jericho road was therefore not a strong one; and it was hampered by the difficulty of supplies, which had either to come a long way by road down the Jordan valley from the north, or from Amman across the plateau of Moab and down the steep road from Es Salt. Both routes were heavy and slow for all kinds of transport.

As a preliminary to the advance, the Londoners at dawn on February 14th seized Mukhmas—the ancient Michmash—and the 53rd made progress on the north. Early on the morning of the 19th the 60th and 53rd began their march. The Londoners met with stout resistance from successive ridges, but by nightfall had made a general gain of about three miles. During the day Chaytor, after a slow passage across the Wilderness of Jershimon, concentrated the New Zealand Brigade and the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade at El Muntar, about six miles west of the Dead Sea. Both brigades, refreshed by their rest on the Philistine plain, were in good condition. Engaged as they were on the flank in a true mounted capacity, they rode gaily upon an enterprise which they hoped would bring them to the waters of Jordan. Old campaigners now, they were proof against depression, no matter how rough the road or difficult the task. They complained only of monotony. If, as upon this venture, they were introduced to strange conditions, and promised the conquest of further famous places, they were content, and even reckoned themselves favoured. They rode down through the old Wilderness of Judah with thoughts of John the Baptist and the Forty Days of the Fasting, and no tourists were ever more eager for a first glimpse of the Dead Sea and Jericho and the Jordan. Before them as they rode, dark and curiously straight in its skyline, loomed across the deep depression of the Jordan the frowning wall of Moab.

Early on the morning of the 20th, while the infantry

advancing astride the Jericho road occupied Talat ed Dumm after sharp fighting, the Anzac Mounted Division, with the New Zealanders leading, made a dismounted attack upon Jebel el Kahmum and Tubk el Kaneiterah, two dominating hills occupied by the enemy in some strength. So harsh and broken was the country that even without their horses the New Zealanders were compelled to proceed in single file along the beds of dark, confined gorges, and by narrow bridle-tracks round the sides of the hills. These lines of advance were registered by the enemy, kept constantly under fire from six machine-guns on Tubk el Kaneiterah and eight on Jebel el Kahmum, and also shelled by five guns placed about Nebi Musa in the rear. As the New Zealanders—the Wellingtons directed on Kaneiterah and the Aucklands on Kahmum—drew closer to the position, the ground improved; but the Turks from their heights continued to sweep the approaches, and made progress very slow. Artillery support was badly needed, but the country was impossible for wheels, and the Anzac guns had been sent down the Jericho road behind the infantry. For some hours the attack was arrested, but about noon the infantry on the left of the New Zealanders, after a stern fight over an area which seemed only accessible to fully-equipped mountaineers, drove the enemy from a strong position on the summit of Jebel Ekteif. From there the Londoners threatened the rear of the Turks who held Kaneiterah and Kahmum; and about 2 o'clock they fell back on a great hill beside the Moslem hospice at Nebi Musa, beneath which the Moslems believe the bones of Moses to be buried.

Both the Londoners about Talat ed Dumm, and Cox's light horse brigade on the right of the New Zealanders, were now within easy distance of Jordan valley, and the enemy was in danger, if he lingered over his resistance, of having his communications cut. Soon after the New Zealanders gained the two hills, a troop of the 1st Light Horse Regiment under Lieutenant C. R. T. Parbury,¹ pushing down the Wady Kumran towards the Dead Sea, found it clear of the enemy, and advanced to the level of the plain.

Cox was at once ordered to follow with the whole of his

¹ Lieut C R T Parbury, 1st L.H. Regt Farmer; b Scone, N.S.W., 9 Nov. 1893

brigade, to advance north as far as the Wady Jofet Zeben, and from there to push out patrols. The move, which was not opposed, placed the brigade behind the Turkish trenches at Nebi Musa. Arrangements were made during the night for a combined attack at dawn upon the enemy position, with the infantry and New Zealanders striking from west and south, and the Australians from east and north-east. But the Turks, appreciating the danger when a brigade of horse was free to strike at their communications on the open Jordan plain, withdrew their whole force in the dark from both sides of the Jericho road. By dawn, when their evacuation was discovered, they were already clear of Jericho, and, divided into two bodies, were heading, one north up the old level Roman road towards Beisan, the other eastwards across Jordan by the Ghoraniye bridge.

When it was found that Nebi Musa was clear, and that the enemy had made a general withdrawal, Cox moved on Jericho in the hope of cutting off any force that might be retiring by the old Jericho road. The advanced screen rode rapidly over the plain, which was soft and slimy from the recent rains, and the modern village of Jericho was entered by a troop under Lieutenant W. C. Kelly,² of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, about 8 o'clock. Kelly's brief report ran: "Entered Jericho 0800. Captured twenty-three prisoners. Town now clear. Wounded in hospital. Plenty of water at running stream near town. Inhabitants report guns removed to east side of Jordan, and are now near bridge." There was nothing in Jericho to excite the admiration of the light horsemen. The squalor of the mud and straw hovels was relieved only by the minaret of a small mosque, and by the wretched Jordan Hotel, which in days of peace had housed tourists unfortunate enough to travel without their own camping equipment. To the habitual filth of the natives was added the filth of the Turkish soldiery. In the following summer the limited irrigated area about the village, the sole patch of vegetation which survives to recall the beautiful wide gardens and palm-groves of the Roman occupation, was to provide the

² Lieut W. C. Kelly, 3rd L.H. Regt. Grazier, of Onetree Hill, S. Aust.; b Maitland, Yorke's Peninsula, S. Aust., 29 Dec., 1888. Killed in action, 14 July, 1918.

troops with some fruit and vegetables. But when Jericho was first entered it was destitute of supplies or refreshment, an unsavoury, useless possession; yet, like many other places in the Holy Land, it deeply stirred the emotions of every soldier in Allenby's army.

From Jericho Cox pushed patrols north towards the Wady Auja and east towards the Jordan. About a mile south of the Auja Turks were found holding the road; the approach to the stone bridge across the Jordan at Ghoraniye they held stoutly, finding good concealment in the curious mass of abrupt, low mud-hills, and the fringe of scrub and mangrove-swamp which flank the stream along much of its rapid winding descent from Galilee to the Dead Sea. Across the river they could be seen in considerable numbers. Meanwhile, a squadron of the New Zealanders, emerging from the hills, struck rapidly for Rujm el Bahr, the desolate little port at the north end of the Dead Sea. The Turks had used the Sea for the transport of corn from the east and south, and it was hoped that a useful supply of horsefeed would be found in the settlement. The enemy, however, had removed all supplies, and the New Zealanders found only a few huts with their roofs destroyed and a number of sunken and broken boats.

That night the Australians watched the country to the north along the Auja and eastwards to the Ghoraniye bridge, while the New Zealanders were in observation from the bridge to the Dead Sea. Towards evening the artillery, after a very rough passage and much man-handling, especially in an endeavour to bring fire to bear on the Nebi Musa position, began to reach the valley, and battery commanders were ordered to seek positions from which the Ghoraniye bridge-head and the Turks on the other side could be bombarded. Efforts made during the night to penetrate to the Jordan and the Auja were frustrated by Turkish outposts, but the mission of the Australians and the New Zealanders—which was to gain information about approaches to the stream and the situation at various crossings—was successful. On the following day the two mounted brigades (with the exception of the Auckland Regiment) were relieved by the infantry, and marched back to their pleasant camps near Bethlehem. The descent to the Jordan valley had, despite the terrible nature

of the country, been achieved in a manner and at a cost which gave much satisfaction to Allenby, and the operation was another example of the sound aggressive leadership of the corps commander, Sir Philip Chetwode. The losses to the Anzac Mounted Division were only three men killed and fourteen wounded. The infantry, however, on whom fell, as was usual in the hills, nearly all the fighting, suffered considerable casualties, and many little crosses bearing the names of Londoners afterwards marked the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Soon after the occupation of Jericho, therefore, Allenby was in possession of the line of "the two Auja," which had been his objective when he first assaulted the Gaza-Beersheba trenches on October 31st. After the capture of Jericho by Cox's brigade, the infantry had speedily driven the Turks across the Jordan and to the north of the Wady Auja. As little gain, with the exception of the bridgeheads east of Jordan, was made and held before the grand final advance in the following September, it is opportune at this stage to outline the positions of the opposing armies.

Beginning on the Mediterranean coast, the British line joined the sea about five miles north of the mouth of the Nahr Auja, and ran slightly south-east across the plain of Sharon to the foot-hills of Samaria. The plainland was made up of wide, rich flats broken by chains of low, rolling sand-hills. Approaching the foot-hills of Samaria, the country was dotted by abrupt, detached hills with stony outcrop, usually the sites of ancient castles and modern villages, and admirably adaptable for defensive works, which dominated the open ground on either side. Across the highlands of Samaria, as far as the watershed, the trenches followed hills less stony than the stark Judæan ranges in the south. But east of the watershed, in the descent to Jordan valley, the country, if slightly less desolate than the Wilderness of Judah, was still so abrupt, rough, and trackless as to make military operations almost impossible. This stretch was in consequence very lightly held by either side. Descending sharply to the valley of the Jordan the line crossed a belt of rough foot-hills about a mile and a half north of the Wady Auja. This group of hills, known as the Abu Tellul and Musallabeh position, jutted boldly out into

the valley, and commanded the narrow strip of level plain between its rocky heights and the mud-hills skirting the river. The great broken knoll of Musallabeh, on the edge of the plain, was the extreme northern point of the British line in the Jordan valley; and its retention, with the hills on its south-western flank, was essential for the possession of the gushing, spring-fed stream of the Wady Auja. From Musallabeh towards the river a narrow strip of plain was left open, but the line was continued in strongly-dug positions about the lower Auja and along the Wady Mellahah, a tributary from the Auja towards the north-west.

From Musallabeh to the Dead Sea is about fifteen miles; the valley of the Jordan from the foot-hills behind Jericho to the foot-hills of Moab is about ten miles wide. The Jordan follows roughly the middle of the plain, so that the area occupied by the British on the west of the river, from the end of February to September, contained about eighty square miles. For a mile or two after clearing the foot-hills the floor of the valley is fairly level and easy for all traffic; as it approaches the fantastic mud-hills which fringe the river, it becomes broken and rough, and access to the stream is only gained over stretches made difficult in places by stagnant swamps and mangrove bushes. The average year's rainfall in the valley does not exceed five inches, but this invariably takes place within a few weeks about the end of the year, and is sufficient to promote a vigorous growth of coarse, short-lived grasses. By May the valley is again parched and naked of vegetation, except for scattered clumps of stunted scrub on the plain, and larger bushes and small oaks growing freely in the wide, rough beds of the wadys. Fringing the swamps along the river, little forests of twisted timber, about the size of the Australian tea-tree, yield supplies of firewood. In Old Testament days the jungle along the Jordan was wide and dense enough to give shelter to lions and other beasts of prey, and to-day it is still the home of wild pigs, which in the summer of 1918 occasionally provided a little sport for the light horsemen.

The Jordan, where it enters the Dead Sea, is 1,290 feet below sea-level. Ranges rise abruptly on either side of the valley to a height of about 4,000 feet above the river, so that there is, even in the cool season, a strange, sinister sense

of oppression and confinement. This is increased by the bare, desert aspect of the mountain sides, and especially by the dark, still surface of the Dead Sea, and the steep, rocky, and gloomy walls with which it is enclosed. The absence of human life intensifies the sense of desolation. Elsewhere in Palestine, even in the Wilderness, the rider is seldom out of sight of the Arab shepherd or one of his little villages. But in the Jordan valley, especially on the western side, the natives are seldom seen far beyond Jericho at any season of the year; and at the approach of the dread summer months the village, like the surrounding plain, is deserted by every Arab who can escape to the highlands. Holy men, attracted by religious associations and the isolation of the region, have founded monasteries in the locality. The Greek Monastery of St. George, which is believed to contain the cave where Elijah was fed by the ravens, is hewn out of the precipitous cliffs of the Wady Kelt, a few miles above Jericho; another stands half-way up the desert face of Jebel Kuruntul, where the grotto in which Jesus is held to have fasted for the Forty Days is used as a chapel; while out on the flat, close to the generally accepted place of our Saviour's baptism, is the white Monastery of St. John. The monks, however, were seldom seen by the troops, and their unseen presence served only to deepen the unworldly, miraculous note in that strange atmosphere, brought about in part by the unique physical conditions and in part by the long train of supernatural and historical events which are associated with the region. From Jericho the Australians and New Zealanders looked over the generally accepted sites of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the valley, to the high knoll of Nebo upon Moab, from which Moses, before he was gathered to his fathers, viewed the Promised Land across Jordan. Jericho itself recalled Joshua and his trumpeters; Antony and Cleopatra and Herod; the glory of the Roman City of Palms; Christ and the publican. A walled "garden" on the summit of Kuruntul marked the traditional spot of the Temptation. Clearly marked across the river were the old tracks leading to the passes of Moab, linking Judæa with the tribes of Gad and Reuben who, attracted by the fat pastures of the plateau, decided to remain east of the Jordan, and later with flourishing colonies of Greek and Roman origin.

Southwards was Masada, a great rocky cape projecting into the Dead Sea, where in 70 A.D. 700 Jews made their last stand against the Romans under Flavius Silva, and where the men of the garrison finally slew one another and their women and children rather than fall into the hands of the victors. Only debatable mounds, and fragments of stone bridges and viaducts built by the Romans, remain to tell of all the wonder and glory and tragedy that are gone; but nowhere in the world is the atmosphere so heavy with suggestions of the past, and—whatever may be the reason—nowhere is man so little disposed to question conventional history or to challenge the assertions of faith and tradition. “The whole region is a sepulchre.”

When, in February, the Australians and New Zealanders first rode down from the Wilderness of Judah, the valley, after the bitter cold of the stony hills, was a warm and restful place, brilliant with the bloom of many fleeting flowers. The light, marly soil was in patches wet and slippery, but the men easily found dry camping places, and the horses ate greedily of the grasses. Free of mosquitoes, heat, and dust, there was then no indication of the hideous conditions which were to play havoc with the force in the summer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE RAID TO AMMAN

THE capture of the Jordan valley gave Allenby a sound right flank. At the same time it denied to the Turks the use of the Dead Sea and the Wilderness country, and so relieved Jerusalem of any menace from the east. Moreover, it cleared the way for active co-operation with the Arabs. In January, Sherifian troops from the Akaba base had appeared within a few miles of the important Turkish garrison at Maan, where in a number of small engagements they killed several Turks, took many prisoners, and destroyed parts of the railway. These rebuffs compelled the enemy to send down substantial reinforcements from the north, including a battalion of Germans; the Arabs were driven from Et Tafilé and from other positions which they had occupied, and their offensive was arrested.

In his struggle against the Arabs, the dependence of the Turk upon the long railway track from Damascus to Medina was absolute. The country, especially to the south, was incapable of supporting considerable forces; and the mounted Arabs, although reluctant to fight at close quarters except when in overwhelming numbers, excelled in raids against isolated Turkish parties away from the railway line. It was, therefore, impossible for the enemy to roam over the land in search of supplies, and all rations, munitions, and equipment had to make the long, slow journey by rail from the north. The Arab aim was to throw the line out of use; again and again they destroyed sections of the track, but the Turks quickly made repairs on the easy, level country, and suffered no permanent disablement; meanwhile they were careful to guard tunnels and viaducts, which would have taken longer to renew, with forces sufficient to keep the Arabs at a distance.

At Amman—the Rabbath Ammon of the Old Testament and the Philadelphia of Ptolemy II and the Greeks—the Hejaz railway passed over a long viaduct and through a tunnel, the destruction of which would have held up transport for several weeks. The modern village lies thirty miles east-north-east of Jericho in a direct line; although much further by the

existing tracks, it was still within raiding distance of Chauvel's mounted troops. During February Allenby decided to make a dash at the position, as soon as the weather cleared, with Anzac Mounted Division and the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Battalions of the Camel Brigade, the 60th Division of infantry being in close support. If successful, the raid would for a time isolate and seriously embarrass the Turks to the south; at worst it would tend to draw the enemy north from Maan, and so ease the task of the Arabs; while in a general way it would unsettle the enemy along the whole British front, and make his High Command uncertain as to where the next heavy blow would fall.

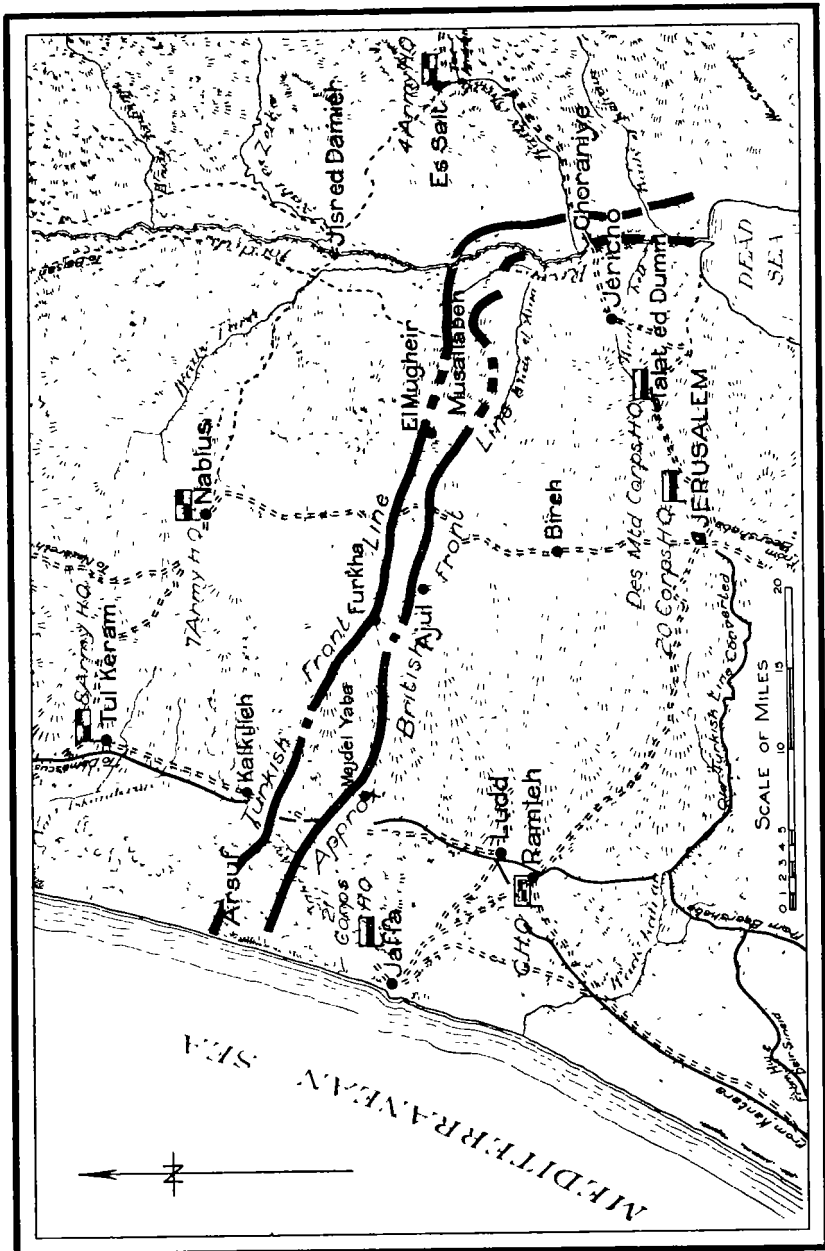
In these and subsequent operations east of the Jordan, Allenby was looking ahead. At this time he had already decided that when he next advanced with his whole army, he would strike with his main strength up the plain of Sharon on the west. It was therefore good policy to show all possible activity on the Jordan side, and this consideration gives a high strategic importance to the fighting in Gilead in March, April, and May. Success at Amman and Es Salt was desirable, but something less than success would serve the Commander-in-Chief's far-sighted purpose.

The enterprise was placed under the command of General Shea, the spirited leader of the 60th Division. "Shea's Group," as the force was called, was supported by a mountain artillery brigade, a heavy battery, and a brigade of armoured cars. His task was stiff and complex. First the infantry had to force the Jordan, in the face of considerable enemy troops concentrated at all the possible crossings. Then, after building bridges (for the Turks had blown up the stone bridge at Ghoraniye), it was necessary for the British to climb through steep and narrow passes up the side of Gilead on to the plateau, and after a long march attack what was practically an unknown objective at Amman. With summer conditions and a swift surprise advance, the raid might have been completely successful. But with faulty intelligence, heavy rains in March, the Jordan in high flood and its approaches wet and boggy, every wady on Gilead running a banker, and the ground on the tableland and around Amman so sodden that mounted work was almost impossible and foot marching very slow—in

view of all these obstacles the operation was from the outset unpromising. Worst of all was the compulsory co-operation with the Arabs, which necessitated disclosing to them the British intentions.

As Sherifian activities extended to the north, most of the local tribes gave the Hejaz leaders more or less support. But no tribe could be looked upon as a sure ally. The Arabs throughout played the safe game of waiting for decisive fighting by the British before becoming pronounced in their sympathies and assistance. Round Amman they were in March still friendly to the Turks, and there was no clearly-defined line between those who were disposed to join the Hejaz movement and those who were not. News travels rapidly among these nomads, and the British designs, once communicated to the Sherifian leaders, were undoubtedly soon fully known to the Turks. The crossing of the Jordan was delayed for some days by floods; during that time the enemy concentrated around Amman 4,000 troops with fifteen guns and a large number of machine-guns. Trenches were dug, and the approaches to the tunnel and viaduct safeguarded against anything but a sustained assault by a strong force. At the same time the enemy marched 2,000 reinforcements towards Es Salt from the north. A raid which fails to take the enemy by surprise has but a slender chance of success, especially when, as at Amman, the raiding party is operating far away from its base.

About the middle of March the Anzac Mounted Division and the Camel Brigade were gathered about Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as a preliminary to concentration in the neighbourhood of Talat ed Dumm, whence they were to move towards the Jordan. Shea hoped to force the river crossings on the 18th. This adventure proved the greatest of all the many raids carried out by the light horsemen, the New Zealanders, and the Camels; and the story of the march from the Mediterranean seaboard across the maritime plain, over the western and eastern ranges of Palestine, passing on the way Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Jordan valley, and ending with hard fighting on the fringe of the Arabian Desert, touches upon every phase of the campaigning life of Allenby's mounted forces.



THE OPPOSING FRONT LINES (BETWEEN THE TWO AUJAS), FEBRUARY, 1918.

The progress of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade in the early stages may be taken as typical of the whole. For some time before the Amman exploit Ryrie's regiments had been in camp at their favourite village of Wady Hanein, down on the Philistine plain. Many of the officers were billeted in Jewish houses, and the horsemen were scattered over the surrounding sand-hills. The closest possible secrecy was observed concerning the operations; but, as usual, every man knew days before the move that some big game was afoot, and intelligent speculation round the camp-fires led to a general belief that the new objective lay across the Jordan. The light horsemen had now in spirit become true soldiers of fortune. They had no longer any expectation of an early end to the war. They had no pleasant places in which to spend their occasional periods of leave, for they had tired of Cairo and Port Said. They therefore followed their soldier's life with great heartiness, fighting like devils when they had to fight, and missing none of the little pleasures along the many strange tracks they rode. About the villages they wooed the Jewish girls with great industry but little success, and dabbled heavily, but with much entertainment to the Jews, in many foreign languages. Despite the barriers of blood and speech and faith, the Jews grew fond of these big Australians on their big horses, discovering that beneath their terrible aspect they were gentle and chivalrous young men with a clean, brave outlook and an unfailing respect for all that was good and just in life. On the morning of the 13th, when the three regiments saddled up in the dawn, their lines were thronged with Jewish families, who, aware that fighting was ahead, and exaggerating in their timid minds the horrors of war, shed tears as they bade farewell to their favourite troopers, pressed upon them little parting gifts, and wished them God-speed. Deeply and severely religious as many of these people were, there was something very moving in the blessings they invoked.

Riding past the olive-groves to Ramleh, the light horsemen followed the main road to Latron, a very gay and eager column; for, although heavy fighting might be ahead, they would before that be seeing Jerusalem, and perhaps Bethlehem, and every mind anticipated the crossing of Jordan on the way to the land of Moab. They rode with the strong purpose of

old soldiers, but still with the sharp expectancy of happy travellers venturing into a famous land touched with mystery and hallowed by religion, history, and tradition, all more or less familiar to them since their childhood. On either side of them was the glory of a spring day on the rolling maritime plain, with its thousand crazily-shaped little patches of crops illumined with wild flowers. Overhead was a blue sky flecked with occasional white clouds. Larks sang their sustained song, and in the long column of horsemen there was a note of joy and youth rare in that exhausted old land of suffering and ruins.

On the bare slopes behind Latron the brigade halted during a day of strong wind, and parties rambled with enthusiasm over the ruins of the Crusaders' stronghold. At night came heavy rains which, falling for days over all Palestine, delayed the plan of operations, and each hour diminished the prospect of success. The camping-ground became a bog, and every little "bivvy" cunningly built of waterproof sheets was awash. The horses shivered on the swampy lines; the heavily-laden camels, urged on by their wretched, ill-clad, barefooted Egyptian drivers, fumbling and slipping and mutely protesting, were one of the thousand minor tragedies which follow in the wake of war.

In an incessant downpour of rain the brigade rode from Latron to Jerusalem. Every wady was in flood, the ranges sounded with the noise of rushing waters, and a heavy mist enshrouded the hilltops; but from every sheltered corner in the dripping rocks shone out the wild flowers, the same that had rejoiced the eyes of the Crusaders, and the one touch of softness on the cheerless mountain-side. The three brigades of Anzac Mounted Division were now concentrated about Jerusalem, and the Camel Brigade was at Bethlehem. The 60th Infantry Division was waiting in the Jordan valley and on the hills overlooking Jericho; the mounted men were within a night's march of Talat ed Dumm; all was ready for the attempt to force the crossing. But the Jordan was in high flood (during one night at this time the waters rose seven feet); the swollen current added greatly to the task of building the pontoon bridges; the approaches to the river were sodden and difficult. General Shea was therefore forced to postpone all movement for three days.

This delay, of so much concern to Chaytor—whose Anzac command now included the Camel Brigade, and who was to conduct the mounted operations at Amman—was not unwelcome to the troopers. The men of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Jerusalem, and of the Camel Brigade at Bethlehem, were for the first time in the Holy Places; careless of what awaited them east of Jordan, they explored the cities with the zest of pilgrims. In all the war the army chaplains out of the firing line were never worked so hard as they were in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem. The curiosity of the men was boundless; and their diligent reading of the Old and New Testaments, combined with a true reverence, strangely broken by sceptical challenges and even lapses into daring, good-humoured blasphemy, imposed a heavy strain on the physical endurance, the biblical knowledge, and the temper of the regimental padres. From daylight to dark these good men walked the many ways of Christ at the head of successive parties of troopers, who enjoyed nothing so much as “to take a fall” out of their guides. Full of significant suggestion was this spectacle of young Australian light horsemen, led by churchmen in military dress and emu feathers, heavy boots, and clinking spurs, proceeding along the Via Dolorosa or gathered around the traditional Stations of the Cross.

Some of the church services held at this time were deeply moving. The Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem preached a special sermon to the Anzacs at St. George's Cathedral, and all thoughtful men in that congregation reflected upon the strength and glory and endurance of the teaching and life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Very impressive, too, was a Mass celebrated by Chaplain T. Mullins,¹ of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, one morning in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Sectarianism, that unfortunate intrusion of old-world prejudices into the national life of Australia, did not follow the light horsemen to Palestine. If a padre was a man's man and a soldier of Christian character, few troopers troubled about his particular denomination. Padre Mullins was such to the full, and consequently some 200 officers and men of various churches marched with him to his service at

¹ Chaplain the Rev T. Mullins, M.C. Of Ardlethan, N.S.W., b. Limerick, Ireland, 12 Feb., 1877. Died, 14 Jan., 1939.

the Holy Sepulchre. The light horseman made no parade of his faith; he rather aimed at concealing it. The senior Australian chaplain in Palestine, the brilliant and witty Chaplain Maitland Woods,² once very shrewdly said in a thanksgiving service after victory: "I would describe the light horseman as a man who, while denying he is a Christian, practises all the Christian virtues."

On the night of the 20th the mounted force moved down the Jericho road to camping sites on the rough wilderness about Talat ed Dumm. The Jordan was still in flood, but the rain had passed and the waters were falling. Pains were taken to conceal the horses and camels in the folds between the hills, and special care was exercised in the lighting of fires and in all movement. But these precautions were thrown away; already the Turks were aware of the British plans, not only for the crossing of the river, but for the destruction of the tunnel and viaduct at Amman.

During the 21st, when the Londoners of the 60th Division were concentrated in the Wady Nueiamah north of Jericho, the enemy reinforced his defences opposite the Ghoraniye crossing with about 600 infantry, and also sent two squadrons of cavalry to the support of his force at the Makhadet Hajla ford further south. With all the fords impassable because of the floods, the Turks might have been expected to deny a passage to the British force. But a river has always been a doubtful barrier in warfare, especially when, as at the Jordan, the attacking army has a choice of bridging sites, and so can deceive the enemy by misleading feints. After careful reconnaissance, Shea had decided to force crossings and throw bridges over the stream at both Ghoraniye and Makhadet Hajla, while strong holding demonstrations were made by minor infantry forces at five summer fords to the north and south.

After nightfall on the 21st, the Londoners stealthily approached the river at the selected points, and about midnight selected swimmers entered the swift current at Ghoraniye and attempted to carry a line to the other side. The stream at the old bridge, even in flood, did not exceed some thirty paces in

² Chaplain the Rev. W. Maitland Woods, O.B.E., V.D. b. London, Eng., 4 Jan., 1864.

width. But the waters swept along at nearly seven miles an hour; the banks were fringed with scrub and overhanging trees; and the task was complicated by the frequent bends in the river, which made it very difficult for the swimmers to keep direction. Punts and rafts were also launched, but without success. Many gallant essays were defeated by the current and the darkness; and the Turks, becoming alarmed, opened brisk fire upon the Londoners with rifles and machine-guns. News was then received of a successful crossing at Hajla, and it was decided to abandon for the time the attempt at Ghoraniye.

At Hajla the actual bridging party was made up of "D" Troop of the 1st Field Squadron Australian Engineers, who were attached to Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters, under the capable leadership of Captain E. J. Howells.³ A squadron of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, under Major Dick, acted as a working party to assist in the bridge building, but the driving force of the enterprise was the 23rd Battalion of Londoners, led by Major Craddock, a broker on the London Stock Exchange. Just before midnight a party made up of Sergeant E. S. Claydon,⁴ Lance-Corporal R. Strang,⁵ Sappers S. Dawson⁶ and H. R. Y. McGuigan,⁷ and a few Londoners approached the river bearing a raft about 300 lbs. in weight. Dawson volunteered to swim across the rapid, swollen stream with a light line. He was followed into the water by Lieutenant J. W. R. Jones⁸ and half-a-dozen others, both British and Australians. The infantrymen swam naked, but carried their rifles. Dawson was first across, and assisted the others to land. At 1.20 a.m. on the 22nd the first raft, with twenty-seven Londoners, reached the eastern bank. Considerable forces of infantry were at once concentrated on ground covering

³ Capt E. J. Howells, M.C. 1st Field Sqdn., Engrs. Engineer; of Camberwell, Melb., Vic; b. Barrow, Eng., 20 May, 1882.

⁴ Lieut E S Claydon, 1st Fld Sqdn, Engrs. Electrical engineer; b. Concord, Sydney, N S W, 1 Jan, 1895

⁵ 2nd Cpl. R. Strang (No. 18024; 1st Fld Sqdn., Engrs.). Builder; of Bellevue Hill, Sydney, N S W, b. Glasgow, Scotland, 26 June, 1880

⁶ L/Cpl S. Dawson, M.M. (No. 12967, 1st Fld. Sqdn. Engrs.). Colliery manager; of Hobart, Tas; b. Hanley, Staffs, Eng, 3 Aug., 1880.

⁷ 2nd Cpl H R Y. McGuigan, D C M (No. 241, 1st Fld. Sqdn., Engrs.), Farmer, of Cairns, Q'land; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 1886.

⁸ Lieut J. W. R. Jones 1st Fld. Sqdn, Engrs. Fitter and turner; of Coolgardie, W Aust; b. Beetaloo, S. Aust, 2 Oct., 1890

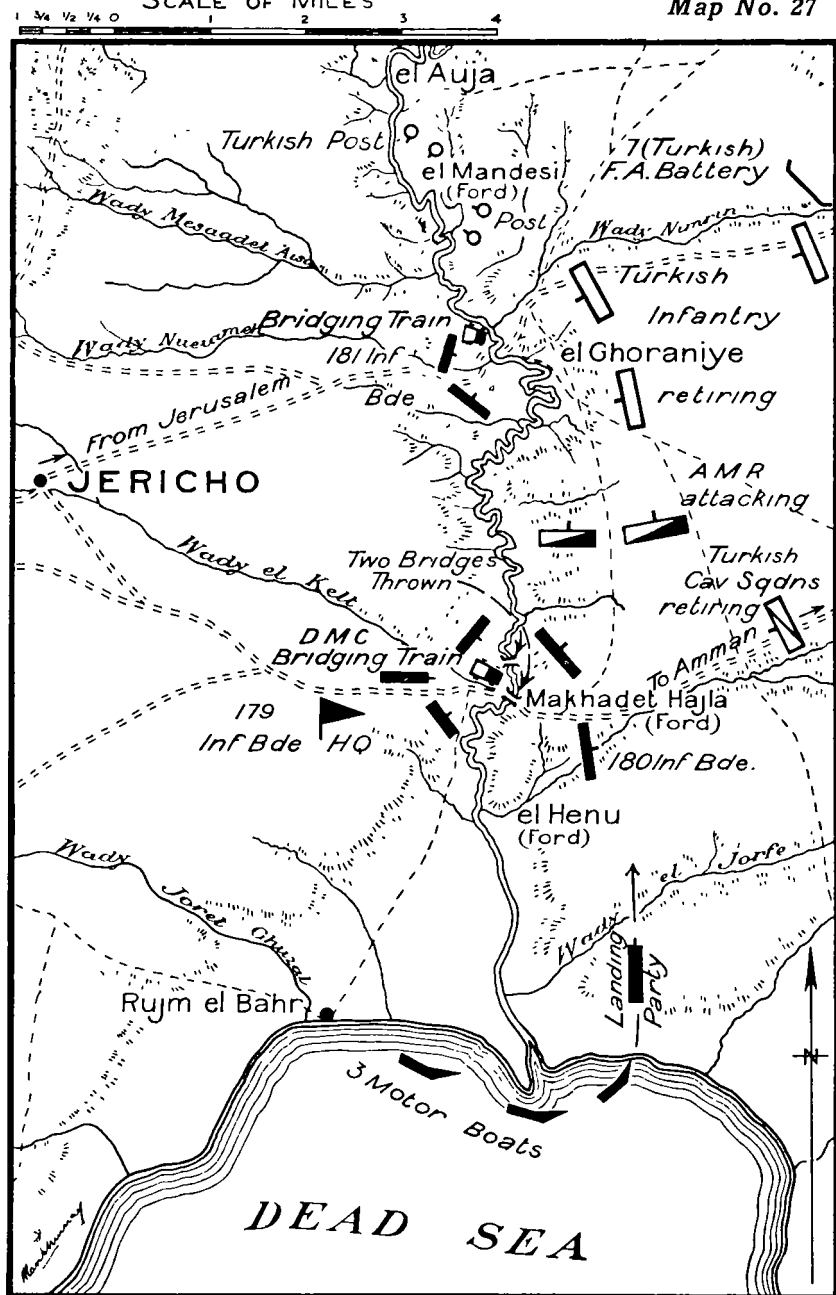
Howells' engineers and the light horsemen; the material for a pontoon bridge was steadily assembled; at 6 o'clock the construction was begun, and at 7.15 the river was spanned. Meanwhile, the raft was busily employed carrying across small parties of infantry, and at dawn a company was in position on the east bank. Daylight enabled the Turks to open effective fire with machine-guns, and the load on the raft had then to be reduced to eight, the men lying flat on the bottom. Casualties were numerous; of one load of eight Londoners seven were hit. But additional rafts were employed, and before 8 a.m. the 2/19th Battalion of the Londoners had been ferried over; by noon the 2/18th had followed. As the men landed they endeavoured to clear a bridgehead, but were strongly resisted by enemy machine-guns on the mud-hills immediately beyond. The work of the bridge builders and the supporting parties was marked by coolness and efficiency, and was distinguished by individual acts of gallantry. Lance-Corporal F. Bell,⁹ of the engineers, repeatedly swam down stream under heavy fire, bearing the cables which were to hold the bridge in position. Meanwhile, further attempts to cross at Ghoraniye were beaten off by the enemy fire.

During that night the Auckland Mounted Rifles, who had since the occupation of Jericho been patrolling the west side of the valley, marched to Hajla, and at 4 a.m. on the 23rd the New Zealanders led their horses over the bridge. Riding through the little ring of Londoners they proceeded vigorously to enlarge the bridgehead, and then, moving north, took the Turks in rear at Ghoraniye. The enemy had already decided to yield the river, and were falling back towards the foot-hills about Shunet Nimrin, where the main road from the plain follows the Wady Shaib in its steep climb to Es Salt. The Aucklands made the most of the position, and, shooting at the gallop from their saddles, killed many Turks; before noon they had captured sixty-eight prisoners and four machine-guns, and cleared the country opposite Ghoraniye. Here the Londoners, renewing their efforts at dawn under cover of heavy machine-gun fire, had succeeded in swimming the river,

⁹ 2nd Cpl. F. Bell, D.C.M. (No. 17947, 1st Fld. Sqdn, Engrs.). Engineering draughtsman; of Walsh Island, Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Ipswich, Eng., 16 Feb., 1886. Died, 13 Oct., 1933.

SCALE OF MILES

Map No. 27



CROSSING OF JORDAN, 22ND-23RD MARCH, 1918.

and bridge building was already in progress. Before nightfall on the 23rd four bridges were completed at the two crossings, and motor-boats, launched on the Dead Sea, were also carrying troops to the eastern side.

Shea's plan was to advance with the infantry by the main road to Es Salt, first seizing the foot-hills on the line Tel el Musta-El Haud on either side of the track above Shunet Nimrin. A mounted force, moving by a rough track to the north, was to endeavour to surprise and capture Es Salt while the infantry pushed up the road. At the same time the other mounted brigades, with the exception of a body which was to hold the Jordan valley to the north, were to climb by various tracks up the mountain side, concentrate on the tableland, and strike swiftly at Amman. The infantry, having gained Es Salt, was to remain there to prevent the enemy from driving in a wedge between Amman and Es Salt on the plateau, and was, if necessary, to send reinforcements to help the horsemen and the Camel Brigade at Amman.

At this stage in the narrative the quality and attitude of the Arabs in the sphere of operations should be considered. As we have seen, the natives north of Maan—where the Hejaz leaders were now operating—had not yet declared definitely for Hussein of Mecca and his fighting sons. It was confidently anticipated, however, that as the Hejaz force moved north these tribesmen—if certain that the British and Arabs were the winning side, and if paid their price in gold, rifles, and munitions—would declare against the Turks. They were therefore to be looked upon by Shea as very friendly neutrals, from whom, with careful handling, much was to be expected. All the British and Dominion troops were ordered to treat them with the utmost respect and consideration. With the exception of Newcombe's party at Asluj, neither General Allenby nor his men had yet had any actual contact with the tribesmen east of the Jordan. They knew the wretched quality of the natives of western Palestine; but, influenced perhaps by tradition rather than Army Intelligence report, they were loth to believe that the bold, proud, fighting Arab of romance was in truth scarcely superior to the lazy, cowardly, and squalid people among whom they had lived and fought during the past two years. It was therefore laid down in orders that

"as the general goodwill and assistance of the inhabitants east of Jordan is of first importance, all ranks must be warned to treat them with the greatest consideration; all payments are to be made in cash, and all friction is to be strictly avoided. It must be remembered that these natives are of a very different class to those hitherto met with." Troops were also reminded that east of Jordan Arabs were men strong in race-pride, very jealous of their women, quick to take offence, and instant and strong in revenge. This picture of the people served greatly to quicken the interest of the invaders in their enterprise. They felt that they were not only venturing into a strange country rich in historical and religious associations, but about to meet in his home the austere and splendid Arab of the books of their childhood. Unfortunately, still another Holy Land illusion was to be dissipated.

With the bridges complete and free from enemy fire, the way was clear for the advance. On the night of the 23rd Chaytor marched his mounted troops, including the Camel Brigade, down from their bivouacs about Talat ed Dumm and Nebi Musa, and towards the morning all four bridges were clattering under the shod horses. The night in the valley was fine and warm, with bright moonlight, and the force was in perfect physical condition and keen for the adventure. As the regiments waited their turn to cross, hundreds of troopers threw themselves on the ground, and almost instantly were sleeping soundly; others, with a fine disregard for what the future might bring, gathered into groups, boiled their "quarts" in the shelter of the broken ground, and made an extra meal of little luxuries carried down on the saddles from the army canteens at Jerusalem. Among these old campaigners there was no evidence of high tension.

The first light horsemen to cross the river were the troops of the 6th Regiment at Hajla, under Lieutenant-Colonel Fuller, who had rejoined his regiment a few hours earlier, after a brief spell of leave in Australia. The rest of the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade followed, and Fuller's Regiment was sent forward at dawn to seize the foot-hills about Teleil Muslim as speedily as possible. The three brigades of the 60th Division were already across, and the Canterbury and Wellington Regiments, with the headquarters

of the New Zealand Brigade, the Camel Brigade, and Cox's 1st Light Horse Brigade, made the east side during the morning. While Ryrie followed the 6th Regiment due east, Cox was pushed up the valley to the north, his mission being to locate the track leading to Es Salt from the Umm esh Shert crossing of the Jordan, and to occupy a line which would cover it from the north. One squadron of the 3rd Regiment was opposed by about 150 enemy cavalry, who after a brief encounter retired over the river to the west by the Umm esh Shert crossing. On the right, Cox made touch with the Londoners, who were advancing on the high hill El Haud north of the Es Salt road.

Advancing due east across the valley, Ryrie's 2nd Brigade met with no opposition, though a single enemy shell was fired at them, and except at a considerable distance no Turks were seen until Amman was reached three days later. The two sides of the valley present a remarkable contrast in fertility. On the west the plain is a desert waste with no traces of cultivation. But, as the light horsemen cleared the mud-hills on the east, they rode into a wide area of flourishing crops of bearded wheat in full head. Careful not to offend the native owners, the horsemen followed narrow footpaths through the grain, and resisted the temptation to jump off and pull sheaves for their hungry horses. Suddenly a great shouting was heard, and a swarm of men and boys mounted on Arab ponies of many colours came galloping, careless of damage, across the growing wheat. In the distance they were picturesque and imposing, and expectation ran high. Here at last, thought the Australians, were the superior men of the east of Jordan, the true Arabs of Arabia. They raced down, shouting, and waving their rifles, and in flowing dress of many hues made a gallant show against the green countryside. Seeking the Australian leader, they reined up their Arab steeds in a clamorous throng round Ryrie and his staff. At close range they were a strange, motley lot of warriors. Physically beautiful men, with an easy, graceful carriage, they rode miserable, skinny, little ponies, greys and bays and chestnuts, some with rich saddles and trappings, but most of them with the leather in tatters. Many of the wretched ponies bore two splendid men; or an Arab with the native majesty of a

Saladin, clad in robes of silk and with a great sword at his side and a richly jewelled dagger in his belt, would be astride an emaciated pony, his feet in rusted stirrup-irons attached to the saddle with pieces of rope. In the mass they seemed some strange circus caught in all its soiled bravery in the pitiless light of sunrise. They knew no leader, and, when asked questions by the brigade interpreter, all talked in chorus.

But if in appearance they were unconvincing as soldiers, they were demonstrative in their welcome, and seemed very anxious to serve the British interest. After a brief parley in the grain, they rode with Ryrie towards the foot-hills. On the way they pointed out two badly wounded Turks, victims of the charge of the Aucklands on the previous day. These wretched, bleeding men, fretting in a long agony, had worn dusty patches in the green grass; but they excited only the derision of the Arabs, who had done nothing to give them relief, and who showed surprise when the brigade-major called up his interpreter and told the one still conscious Turk that stretcher-bearers would be summoned, and they would at once receive treatment. Near Salha a large Arab encampment was reached, where, despite Ryrie's protests against delay, the Arab sheikh insisted upon entertaining him and some members of his staff to coffee in a huge, black goat-hair tent, decked with barbarous Manchester cottons. A little further on the regiments halted for breakfast in the foot-hills, where the deep, rich grasses were very welcome to the horses. At about 11 a.m. a few hundred enemy cavalry were seen on the hills to the east, and Ryrie rode forward at the gallop with the 6th Regiment in an attempt to cut off and envelop them. But the intervening country was broken into a hundred stony hills and deep narrow wadys, and the Turks made a leisurely escape. During this movement glimpses were seen of a long enemy camel-train, moving across the Australian front towards the north; it seemed as if the Turks were concentrating the forces which had been scattered between Amman and Maan, so as to prevent their isolation and capture.

Meanwhile, the New Zealanders had been pushing on in the face of desultory shell-fire towards Shunet Nimrin, whence they were to climb the mountains by the track leading up to Ain es Sir. At 3 p.m., Ryrie, having re-assembled his brigade, marched towards Ain el Hekr by the track south of the New

Zealand route. The intelligence as to the state of the tracks proved misleading. Ryrie's route was said to be fit for wheels, and the brigade was in consequence accompanied by its Royal Horse battery and a number of limbers, while behind followed another battery with Anzac Divisional Headquarters, and more limbers carrying the explosives for demolishing the railway works. After leaving the foot-hills the track ascended rapidly, winding tortuously round the beds of narrow, rocky wadys. The foot-hills were scarcely cleared before the guns and limbers were in difficulty; after four miles the path narrowed down to passages between rocks impassable for wheels and difficult even for led horses. After a rapid reconnaissance in the gathering darkness, Ryrie was compelled to advise Chaytor that the batteries and other vehicles must be left behind, and Chaytor agreed. This imposed a delay of some hours while the explosives were being taken from the limbers and placed on camels. At 9.30 p.m., when the march was resumed, the pace became very slow, as the horsemen were obliged to ride only two abreast, and often to lead their horses in single file through the rocky defiles. Behind Divisional Headquarters came Smith's Camel Brigade, and the column was by midnight spread out over many miles in enemy country almost totally unknown, and dependent for guidance upon friendly but nervous Arabs, while the steep, broken ranges on either side of the confined track made the employment of flank-guards extremely difficult.

A blow at the column with machine-guns in the night must have led to confusion; but the Turks had apparently gone right back to Amman, and offered no opposition. At 2 a.m. on the 25th, rain began to fall heavily. The hillsides were already soaked with water, soon the wadys were flooded, and the sloping track and patches of flat rock gave but a precarious foothold to the horses. The night turned bitterly cold. Within an hour most of the men were drenched. But the climb, with the 6th Light Horse as advance-guard, was steadily maintained. Working parties with shovels accompanied the leading squadron, and strove hard to improve the worst patches, but still the whole brigade was at times reduced to leading the horses in single file.

The ascent of the light horsemen, however, was an easy task compared with the terrible climb of the Camel Brigade.

Immediately after leaving the foot-hills General Smith was obliged to dismount his force, and all night the men of the three battalions dragged their camels up the mountain-side. The men hauled and urged; the camels slipped and fell, but still fought steadily on. The brigade straggled in single file almost from the valley to the plateau, winding its fantastic course along crooked and flooded wady beds, and treading narrow ledges round the sides of the hills. In peace time such a feat would have been deemed impossible by any Eastern master of caravaning; but under the brutal lash of war the brigade went surely up to the tableland. "The camels were carried up by the men," said Smith next day. No less fine was the performance of the Egyptian drivers with the pack-camels which carried supplies and explosives.

Ain el Hekr, on the edge of the plateau, was reached by the head of the 2nd Brigade about 4 a.m., and Ryrie, having established outposts, halted there in a narrow, rocky gorge to wait for daylight. Dawn disclosed the brigade drenched and covered with mud, in a valley leading out on to the treeless tableland. Heavy rain was falling; much of the country was under a few inches of water, and little streams gushed from every rocky outcrop. But the spirits of the men, now two nights without sleep, were still high. They jested about their sodden clothes and chilled bodies; with a resource almost miraculous they quickly lit hundreds of little fires with wood which, with the foresight of veterans, they had carried up from the plain below.

However stern and exciting the operation, the light horseman never forgot his horse or his fire. While campea at Talat ed Dumm waiting for the advance, men had walked many miles along the steep, narrow wadys gathering occasional plants of wild barley, content if after hours of climbing and searching they returned with a green feed for their horses. One morning, as they rode towards Amman, they came upon two or three old Turkish telegraph poles. In a few minutes, without any halt to the column, the poles had been pulled down, hacked to pieces with bayonets, and tied up into little bundles of firewood on a hundred saddles.

At Ain el Hekr the head of the column was within a few hours' march of Amman, but the Camel Brigade was still far

down the mountain-side. Smith joined Ryrie on the morning of the 25th, but the day had almost passed before the last of his three battalions reached the plateau. Heavy wind-driven showers fell frequently, and, coupled with the floods, made rest impossible. A large Bedouin encampment provided a few lucky light horsemen with eggs and camel whey, but most of the men were confined to their rations. They had ridden from the valley with one day's supply on their saddles and two on the pack-camels, which had not yet arrived. Already the "iron" rations were being eaten, and the position was giving concern to Chaytor. The Camels, however, were as usual rich in foodstuffs, having three or four days' supply with them; and it was decided to divide these with the men of Ryrie's brigade.

At 7.30 p.m. on the 25th, Chaytor resumed his march with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the Camels. The track was flooded and rocky; heavy showers fell frequently, and the night was piercingly cold. The camels, floundering in the mud, moved very slowly, and the light horsemen had of necessity to conform to their pace. Marching first through Naaur—one of the many Circassian villages planted by the Turks in eastern Palestine as a standing check to the lawlessness of the Arab tribes—the column turned north towards Ain es Sir. The Circassians were, as had been expected, very friendly to the Turks and hostile to the raiders, and at Naaur Captain Suttor, of the 7th Regiment, caught three men signalling with lights. There was, however, still no sign of the Turks. The route was indefinite, and as the force was now close to Amman, the advance-guard of the 7th Regiment, which was leading, moved very cautiously. Halts were frequent; so exhausted were the men that each time, as they dismounted, they would drop exhausted on clumps of wet bushes beside the track, and fall instantly into heavy sleep. And all night, as the brigade crept along, fast-walking horses with men asleep in the saddles would break from the sections and pace up towards the head of the column, until a friendly hand caught their bridles and awakened their stupefied riders.

Just before dawn the head of the column met the New Zealanders encamped at the cross-roads one mile east of

Ain es Sir, where without serious fighting they had captured a party of ninety Turks. Meldrum's brigade had found their track easier than that followed by the Australians, but still too rough for guns and limbers. From Ain es Sir the 2nd Brigade moved a few miles north to Birket um Amud. Chaytor's orders were to move on Amman as soon as his concentration was complete on the tableland. But his men had now been three days and nights without rest, and had passed through a great physical strain. He decided, therefore, to delay the attack for twenty-four hours; and, as the day was fine, the men pitched their "bivvies" and dried their clothes, and, with the exception of those on outpost, were refreshed by sleep.

As the 2nd Brigade was settling down, one of the patrols observed an enemy motor-convoy on the Amman-Es Salt road. Major Bolingbroke, who, in the absence of Cameron on leave in England, was leading the 5th Regiment, was at once ordered to attack with two squadrons. The convoy was quickly enveloped, but not before fifty Turks on a ridge behind had escaped. The Australians took twelve prisoners and found nineteen motor-lorries, three motor-cars, an armoured car, and a number of other vehicles stuck in the mud of the new road. The Germans had damaged the engines of the motors to prevent their removal, and the Bedouins had stripped them of all that was loose. The incident impressed on Chaytor the fact that the enemy was fully aware of the British intentions against Amman; and the ride of Bolingbroke's men over the boggy ground indicated that in the fighting ahead all movement would be desperately slow. Patrols of the 6th Regiment towards the village of Suweile surrounded and captured sixty-one Turks without serious fighting.

Some railway engines and rolling stock were believed to be at Amman; to prevent their escape, Chaytor on the night of the 26th ordered the line to be cut north and south of the station. A party from the New Zealand Brigade succeeded in destroying a section seven miles to the south, but a squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, engaged on a similar mission to the north, were prevented by enemy cavalry from reaching the railroad.

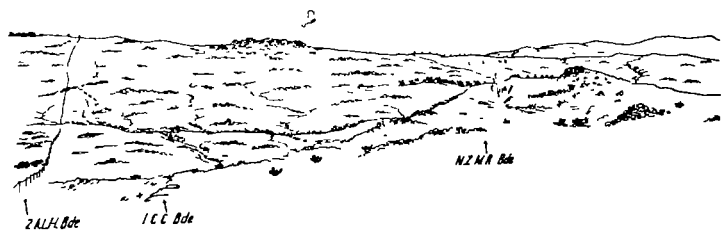
When, on the morning of the 27th, Chaytor ordered the advance on Amman, he had in his two mounted brigades and

the Camel Brigade a force of some 3,000 rifles for the firing line, supported by the single mountain battery of 11½-pounders attached to the Camels. The Turks held Amman with about 4,000 troops in carefully prepared positions; they had fifteen guns, and were strong in machine-guns. The position was almost ideal for defence. The railway ran roughly north and south, passing about one and a half miles east of the settlement. Immediately between Amman and the line was a group of high, rough ranges culminating in Hill 3039, and at the foot of this knoll, beside the Wady Amman, was the modern village. The ruins of the ancient Roman city, including the magnificent theatre and the Street of Columns, are the finest to be found east of Jordan. Immediately north of the settlement is the old Roman citadel, made up of three substantial stone terraces and a tower, all still sound and formidable for defence. The wady, deep and rugged, with many little tributaries joining it close to Amman, flowed eastwards towards the village and then turned north along the railway. Less than two miles south-east of the village, in very rough, mountainous country, lay the stone viaduct and the tunnel which were the British objectives.

Chaytor's three brigades advanced across a number of wide, shallow valleys divided by ridges with stony outcrops. From the last of these ridges they looked down a long slope torn by many water-courses, with intervening patches of boggy, cultivated land, to the foot of the dark hills which rise sharply behind the village. But so rugged was the ground that no glimpse could be had of the village itself. Intelligence was vague, the maps supplied were inexact, and when the attack was launched the whole position was ominously obscure. Outnumbered, sinking deep at every stride in the spongy ground, and unsupported by artillery, the mounted brigades moved steadily towards their invisible foe.

Even before the brigades reached the last crest and dismounted, the Turks from their heights across the wady had a complete view of the advance. Their guns had been registered on every path by which the British must come, and their machine-guns were placed so as to sweep the whole area. The New Zealanders were directed across the Wady Amman on the right, where from the south they were to attack the hill frontage between Amman village and the railway

station. The 1st (Australian) and 2nd (British) Battalions of Camels, with their superior numbers, were to make a direct frontal blow at the village in the centre. Ryrie's brigade was to attempt an enveloping movement north of the village, on the left of the Camel Brigade. As the brigades rode into range of the enemy's guns they were lightly shelled; but it was clear, as it had been on the ride up the range, that the Turk was well satisfied with his position and disposed to let the raiders come to close quarters. On the right the New Zealanders were hotly opposed with machine-gun fire. They found the deep bed of the Wady Amman almost impassable, and were forced to lead their horses in single file, so that it was 3 p.m. before they were ready for the assault. While, therefore, the Camels and 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade advanced resolutely in the centre and on the left, the enemy was not on the first day seriously menaced, as Chaytor had hoped, by the New Zealanders' thrust on the right.



Advance on Amman, 27th March, 1918.

Leaving their horses behind the last of the ridges, about a mile and a half from Amman, the 6th and 7th Regiments of Ryrie's brigade advanced down the boggy slope. The 7th moved directly on the village, with a squadron of the 6th on its left, while the remaining two squadrons of the 6th were put in with the machine-gun squadron, which was pushed forward over very broken ground between the 7th and the Camel Brigade. Marching in extended order on a front of about a mile, the light horse squadrons trudged steadily over the heavy ground, a striking picture of serene courage engaged in a desperate and hopeless mission. Not a Turk was visible; except for a little shelling, there was a sinister silence about the dark, broken base of the steep, bare hills ahead. Had the enemy been only a few hundred strong, he could have

beaten the attacking forces off with rifle-fire alone; in his thousands, and with guns and machine-guns, he could destroy every Australian, if the attack were pressed home. For a time, however, the Turks held their fire, and the light horsemen covered three-quarters of a mile almost without casualties. Then, as if in instant response to a single order, guns, machine-guns, and rifles opened fire together, with a roar and a rattle which echoed and re-echoed from the hills and wadys that covered them. The Australians, although falling thickly, pressed gamely on until some of them were within six hundred yards of the place where they believed the invisible village to be located. But as the enemy corrected his range the deluge of shells and hail of bullets became annihilating in intensity, and the advancing lines were forced to take to the ground for cover. For a time they held on; but they had no targets, their losses continued heavy, and further advance was impossible; they were therefore withdrawn to positions of relative safety.

On the right of the brigade the progress of the machine-gun squadron, under Captain Cain, and the two squadrons of the 6th Regiment had for a time been promising. Cain with his machine-guns was able to reach an old stone house on a patch of high ground looking down on the main wady near Amman, and covering the front of the light horsemen who were attacking on the left. The gunners found good targets; but the enemy had no difficulty in stopping the march of the men of the 6th, and there, too, the attack failed decisively. Further to the right the 2nd Battalion of the Camels made a gallant and spectacular advance across a number of little bare fields surrounded by stone fences. Marching in successive waves with perfect steadiness under a heavy shrapnel barrage, the men penetrated as far as the main wady before they were stopped by blinding machine-gun fire at close range from concealed positions. On the right the effort of the Canterbury and Auckland Regiments of the New Zealand Brigade was not made until the attack by the light horsemen and Camels was spent. The country before Meldrum's men was exceedingly rough, and they were soon brought to a standstill. Shortly before dark the Turks stoutly counter-attacked the Canterburys and drove them from their line; but the Canterburys, rallying with the bayonet, regained the ground and held it during the night.



CROSSING THE JORDAN.

Aust. War Museum Official Photo No B7

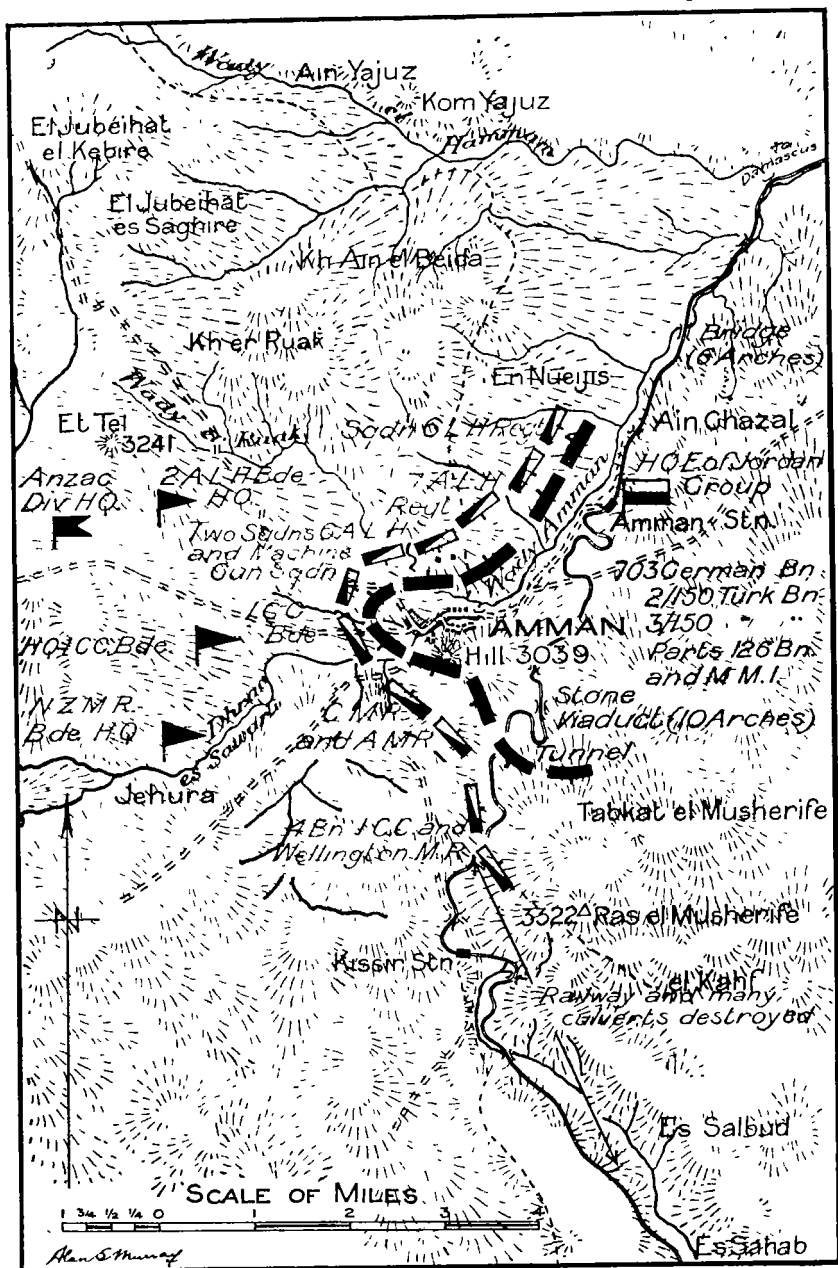
To face p. 500



AMMAN, SHOWING THE RUINS OF THE ANCIENT AMPHITHEATRE.

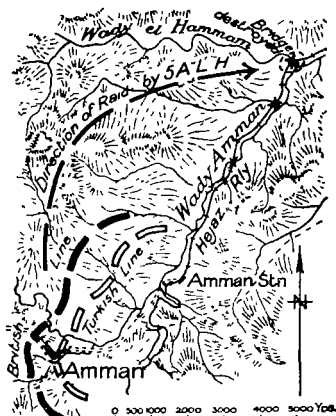
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AMMAN RAID—FIRST ATTACK BY ANZACS AND I.C.C. BRIGADE—
POSITION AT DUSK, 27TH MARCH, 1918.

The 4th Battalion of the Camel Brigade (Australian and New Zealand), under Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Mills,¹⁰ had been sent round beyond the New Zealanders on to the railway south-east of Amman, and at once began a systematic destruction of the line. In this work they were assisted by the Wellington Regiment, and several miles of rails were broken up with explosives. That night Chaytor ordered the 2nd Light Horse Brigade to make a second attempt to cut the railway to the north. Bolingbroke, of the 5th, marching in the darkness with two squadrons over very rough country, reached the railway about 7 miles from Amman. There a two-span



stone bridge about thirty feet long was reached—a good example of marching on the compass—and completely wrecked by Lieutenant H. A. Lockington,¹¹ of the New Zealand Engineers. After an absence of seven hours, the party returned to the brigade at 5 a.m. on the 28th. Amman was now temporarily isolated; but the first day's fighting had convinced Chaytor that the position could not be reduced by his slender mounted force alone. Already there had been over 200 casualties, and, although a few Turks had been captured, the enemy position had not been in the least shaken.

While the mounted force was climbing up to the plateau by the tracks to the south, Es Salt had been won without fighting by the 3rd Light Horse Regiment under Bell, and the 60th Division quickly followed by the main road. On March 25th Cox had renewed his activity along the eastern side of the Jordan valley. The 3rd Regiment in the foot-hills on the right made touch with the infantry towards El Haud, while the 2nd under Bourne crossed the track leading over the plain

¹⁰ Brigadier A. J. Mills, CBE, DSO, VD. Commanded 4th (Anzac) Bn, Imp. Camel Corps, 1917/18, and 15th L.H. Regt, 1918/19. Dentist; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. Glebe Point, Sydney, N.S.W., 10 July, 1884.

¹¹ Lieut. H. A. Lockington, MBE, NZ Engrs. Saw-miller; of Reefton, N.Z.; b. Ross, Westland, N.Z., 13 Nov., 1881.

from Umm esh Shert to Es Salt, and held it against an enemy advance down the plain from the north. Bell, his left flank thus assured, struck up the range for Es Salt. He was to advance on the town as rapidly as possible; but the track, which, as it left the plain, was only located with difficulty, proved particularly rough and steep. In places it ran over naked, flat rock on a sharp gradient, and for three miles the men were compelled to lead their horses. But Bell, one of the most aggressive and astute leaders produced by the light horse, was a happy selection for the mission. Urging on his advance-guard and, as the enterprise demanded, taking all risks, he rode hard for Es Salt. The Turks, startled at the swiftness of his approach—which menaced the communications of the troops which they had opposed to the infantry on the road from Shunet Nimrin—withdrew without fighting. Es Salt is a dark, crowded, mountain-built old town of 15,000 inhabitants. Of these about 4,000 are Christians, who, living isolated among the fanatical Arabs of eastern Palestine, were during the war even more fearful of massacre than were the Christians of western Palestine. As Bell's men rode into the narrow streets, these hapless people were for a time too surprised and incredulous to be demonstrative. But as the Australians cleared the town of the Turkish stragglers, and pushed out covering patrols, and as the infantry battalions marched in a few hours later, they saw in this dramatic intervention their deliverance from the sinister shadow of Moslem rule and from the desert raiders, and their satisfaction and joy were immeasurable.

Even before the attack at Amman began, Shea doubted the capacity of Chaytor's three mounted brigades to achieve the objects of the raid. It was inevitable that the delay of nearly a week must have greatly reduced the chance of a surprise and a quick, decisive action. He therefore ordered a battalion of the 181st Brigade to march from Es Salt for Amman at dawn on the morning of the 27th, when Chaytor was to make his first assault. This battalion was unfortunately delayed by a tribal brawl along the road between the Circassians of Suweile and the Christian Arabs of El Fuheis, in which there was much shooting and picturesque demonstration at harmless ranges. The two remaining battalions of the 181st Brigade were then ordered forward to Amman; marching by night,

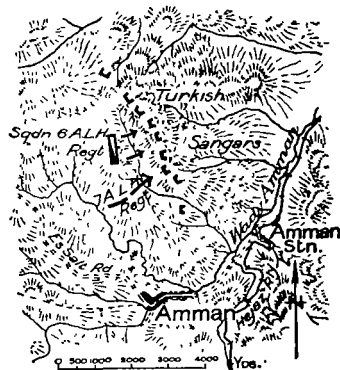
their advance-guards made touch with the Australians early in the morning of the 28th. Chaytor decided to renew the assault early in the afternoon. The 4th Battalion of the Camel Brigade was then on the extreme right, astride the railway, about a mile and a half from Kusr es Seba; the New Zealand Brigade carried the line north-west to within about 1,000 yards of Amman; on the left of the New Zealanders were the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Camel Brigade, with the 2/23rd and 2/21st Londoners on their left; while on the left flank was Rylie's brigade, covering a front of one and a half miles.

The mountain batteries accompanied the infantry from Es Salt, but although they opened fire promptly and did useful shooting on Hill 3039, their metal was too light to have any demoralising effect upon the hidden enemy. Soon after the arrival of the infantry, Chaytor ordered a mounted dash by the two horse brigades for a position north of the town, while the infantry and the Camels made a frontal attack from the south. This, however, was immediately cancelled, and a general dismounted assault was decided upon. The Turks were fully conscious of their strength in numbers and position, and throughout the engagement seized every opportunity to counter-attack. Soon after noon, when the British were deploying for the assault, they fell heavily on the line at the junction between the New Zealanders and the Camels, but after reaching within bombing distance, they were checked with severe losses.

The Londoners had been marching all night over terrible roads; but, when at 1 p.m. the assault was commenced, they dashed forward with so much spirit, and were so speedily lost to view in the folds of the broken ground, that for the moment it appeared as if their weight on a narrow front might prevail. At the same time the 1st and 2nd Camel Battalions drove in strongly on their right, and the New Zealanders pressed vigorously for the dominating Hill 3039. But the promise of achievement was short-lived. As the half-circle converged upon Amman, the troops came under a devastating fire from all arms, and the vigour of their advance was destroyed by sheer casualties. Mills, with the 4th Camel Battalion on the right, and the New Zealanders were arrested by hidden nests of machine-gunners on Hill 3039; the 1st and 2nd Camel Battalions were cut down as they reached the broken ground

about the main wady, and could make no headway until the hill was cleared; while the infantry, who were more exposed, and whose line was shortening and presenting an improving target, were shot to a standstill by the unseen foe.

As the attack developed, two squadrons of the 5th Australian Light Horse Regiment made a mounted dash down a large wady between the Camel Brigade and the infantry. They rapidly covered half-a-mile; but, after dismounting, their attempt was halted by machine-gun fire, while their horses suffered many casualties from the enemy's shells. Meanwhile, out on the extreme left flank the fight had been going badly with Ryrie's 6th and 7th Regiments. The light horsemen, with the 7th on the right next to the infantry, moved off in two lines down a slope covered with patches of young barley, and bearing on an enemy aerodrome in the direction of the Amman railway station. For nearly a mile the men pressed steadily on in the face of heavy machine-gun and rifle fire and light shrapnel. The 7th under Onslow reached a valley faced by a steep ridge, which was held by Turks in a series of stone sangars. On their left the ground rose sharply to a stony ridge which had been gained by a squadron of the 6th under Major H. S. Ryrie.¹² This squadron was only fifty-eight strong when the advance began, and the others were correspondingly weak. Before reaching the ridge Ryrie, a dashing soldier, was severely wounded in the head, and the command was taken over by Lieutenant H. Dickson. From the ridge gained by Dickson's men the ground fell sharply into a narrow gully, and then rose steeply to the ridge occupied by Turks in sangars. Onslow, who was directing both regiments, ordered an attack on the ridge. Dickson at once reported that, as he was being heavily enfiladed from the open flank on his left, and strongly held in front, the prospect



¹² Capt. (temp. Major) H. S. Ryrie, D.S.O., 6th L. H. Regt. Grazier; of Monaro District, N.S.W.; b. Coolringdon, Cooma, N.S.W., 28 March, 1878. Died of wounds, 10 Dec., 1919.

of success was small. The order was repeated; the line of the 7th on his right moved forward, and Dickson dashed over the crest with three troops. Wounded at once, he handed over the command to Lieutenant F. L. Ridgway,¹³ who, followed by his men, made an heroic rush down the slope. The three troops were instantly caught in bursts of machine-gun fire from the front and the left flank; many men fell before they cleared the crest, and of those who went down into the valley only one man, wounded in four places, regained the Australian lines.

The 7th, supported by one troop of Major Ryrie's squadron, moving on the low ground on the right, were stopped at once by the intensity of the fire, and Onslow, seeing the position was grave, ordered a general retirement. Then the Turks, always quick to counter-attack, left their sangars and rushed shouting down the hill. The light horse casualties had been heavy; of the fifty-eight men in Ryrie's squadron of the 6th, forty were killed, wounded, or missing, and the 7th had also been severely handled. For a moment the outlook was critical; but with that coolness and straight shooting which always distinguished the light horsemen at the blackest stages of a fight, the retreating line was at once organised, and, with the assistance of a machine-gun and Hotchkiss guns, the enemy was checked and held while the wounded, except those of the 6th who had crossed the ridge, were carried back to safety. The retirement was then continued for a few hundred yards until a sound defensive line was reached. During the two days the 6th and 7th had suffered severely in both officers and men. Of the officers in the 6th Majors Ryrie and Cross, and Lieutenants G. V. Evans,¹⁴ H. G. Lomax,¹⁵ A. B. Campbell,¹⁶ and H. Dickson were wounded, while Ridgway (who, as was afterwards learned, had been killed) was missing; in the 7th Major Barton, Captain Suttor, and Lieutenant Finlay were wounded.

When night fell, and Shea was able to survey his whole position east of Jordan, the situation was anything but

¹³ Lieut. F. L. Ridgway, D.C.M., 6th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; of Terlings Station, Moree, N.S.W.; b. Toorak, Melb., Vic., 15 June, 1889. Killed in action, 28 March, 1918.

¹⁴ Lieut. G. V. Evans, 6th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Barellan, N.S.W.; b. Tool-amba, Vic., 1 Oct., 1884.

¹⁵ Lieut. H. G. Lomax, 6th L.H. Regt. Drover; b. Neutral Bay, Sydney, N.S.W., 1883.

¹⁶ Lieut. A. B. Campbell, 6th L.H. Regt. Bank clerk; b. Inverell, N.S.W., 5 Oct., 1892.

promising. At Amman the only compensation for two days' heavy fighting and severe losses was the demolition of upwards of five miles of railway on the right. The track destroyed, however, was on the level, and though all the rails were broken its repair would not be a serious task for the Turks. Large bodies of fierce-looking Arabs had swarmed about the various British headquarters and had made eager offers of assistance. Their main purpose, however, was to secure gifts of ammunition for their rifles, and, as Chaytor's supplies were already desperately short, there was little to give to these doubtful allies. One party of about 500 were asked to watch the broken railway bridge to the north, and moved off with apparent joy on their mission. Yet the bridge was repaired, and the Turks on the morning of the 29th brought down a train with reinforcements to Amman station. To the south another body about 1,000 strong volunteered to keep the enemy away from Mills; but on the approach of the Turks they faded off, and the Australians had at times to fight hard to protect their demolition parties. Of another Arab body, which volunteered to watch General Ryrice's exposed left flank, one or two rushed shouting on to the skyline, fired off their rifles in the air, and then ran for their lives. When they were not begging ammunition, they were preying on scraps of food thrown to them by the scornful but amused Anzacs, and cleaning out discarded jam and bully beef tins with their forefingers. A smiling, childlike host, they seemed to look upon the desperate business as a comedy staged for their entertainment.

Not only at Amman was the situation disquieting. The enemy had brought substantial reinforcements across the Jordan at Jisr ed Damieh by the road which leads from Nablus to Es Salt. He was pushing strongly down the valley against the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Regiments of Cox's brigade, and at Es Salt was bringing pressure on the infantry and Bell's 3rd Light Horse Regiment. There was a strong possibility that he might penetrate even as far as the Dead Sea, and so cut the British communications and isolate the large force in the hills and on the plateau.

Intelligence, which was bad throughout the operation, indicated that the enemy contemplated the evacuation of Amman, and Shea ordered Chaytor to persist with his attack.

Nor was Chaytor yet disposed to accept failure. On the evening of the 28th two additional battalions of infantry from Es Salt joined the Amman force, and it was decided to renew the assault early on the following morning. The Londoners, however, were exhausted after their long trudge in the mud; as arrangements for the morning attack would have kept them working through the night, Chaytor decided to postpone it, and to make an attempt upon the position in the darkness of the night of the 29th. A battery of Royal Horse Artillery was ordered up from Shunet Nimrin for this assault.

Throughout the night of the 28th and the day of the 29th the enemy freely shelled Chaytor's positions. The British mountain batteries, outranged and throwing only light shells, or at times without ammunition, were of some moral support to the British, but were never able seriously to trouble the Turkish garrison. Shea had looked for the British airmen to co-operate by bombing the enemy. The heavy rains and mists on the highlands, however, hampered operations in the air, and two forces of aeroplanes which were sent out missed Amman and bombed villages to the north and south. After the failure on the 28th the Turks made persistent attempts to work round Ryrie's exposed left flank. The light horse regiments were reduced by casualties and the employment of men on patrol and other duties. On the night of the 28th the 7th Regiment was able to put only fifty men in the firing line, and, as the front was repeatedly extended to prevent the enemy's outflanking movement, the brigade became so strung out that it was unable to take any further part in the actual attack.

Shea's order to Chaytor for the operations of the night 29-30th was peremptory. Amman must be taken. In deciding on the night assault Chaytor had the support of all officers on the spot who had engaged the enemy at close quarters. The two daylight attempts had made them familiar with the ground, and they believed that a swift advance in the darkness, when the effective use of artillery and machine-guns would be denied to the enemy, had a fair chance of success. The order of the advance was almost identical with that of the 28th. The New Zealanders, with Mills' Camel battalion on their right, the Camel brigade, and the infantry were to concentrate upon

Hill 3039, Amman village, and Amman station; while the 2nd Light Horse Brigade was to distract the Turks by a demonstration on the left.

Rain, driven by strong and biting winds, had fallen at intervals all through the operations, and each morning the water on the bleak countryside had been sheeted with ice. Constantly wet and cold, the men had suffered acutely, while the boggy ground made all movement very exhausting. Happily the supply of rations, although on a slender scale, had been regular. Each night the faithful Egyptian drivers had arrived with their long trains of patient camels; the Australians never perhaps so deeply appreciated the genius and driving force behind the British Army transport service as when, night after night, some sixty miles from railhead at Jerusalem station, they drew their allowance of cheering rum. The night of the 29th was dark, wet, and intensely cold, and despite the desperate nature of the enterprise, all ranks as they shivered in the wind prayed for the order to move. Soon after 2 a.m. on the 30th the advance was begun, and the irregular line, with many gaps caused by wadys and steep ridges, crept forward with bomb and bayonet. For a time they were not discovered; but at 3.10 a.m. heavy rifle and machine-gun fire broke out in front of the infantry, and soon became general along the intricate winding bed of the main wady and on the dark heights beyond.

It was believed that, if early in the fight the New Zealanders could win Hill 3039, the infantry and Camels could carry the whole position, and Meldrum's men pressed towards their objective with all their customary resolution. Working towards the top of the hill from the rear, they captured the higher trenches first at about 4.30 a.m., and at dawn easily compelled the surrender of the line of earthworks lower down, where they took prisoners and six machine-guns. But they were unable to occupy the whole of the hill, and about 9.30 a.m. were strongly assaulted by successive waves of Turks, who charged to within ten yards of the New Zealand riflemen. Mills, however, was now, after a hard-fighting advance, close up on the right, and the New Zealanders and Camels, rising with the bayonet, dashed at the enemy and swept them from the hillside. The New Zealanders suffered sharp losses,

among the killed being Lieutenant S. Berryman,¹⁷ while Captain H. B. Hinson¹⁸ and Lieutenant H. Benson¹⁹ were mortally wounded. Shortly before this a detachment of New Zealanders had penetrated the village, but were at once fired upon from the houses, and, being isolated, were forced to withdraw.

Success had been only piecemeal. The two Camel battalions in the centre, attacking with hand-grenades, had quickly rushed the two enemy trenches which were their immediate objective; but they then found themselves in advance of the New Zealanders on their right and the infantry on their left, and came under heavy enfilade fire from both flanks. Lieutenant F. Matthews with a small party of Australians dashed on beyond the trenches and, like the New Zealanders, entered the village, but was almost at once driven out. The captured trenches were consolidated, but further progress was checked by fire from the part of Hill 3039 still held by the enemy, and from the old citadel to the left.

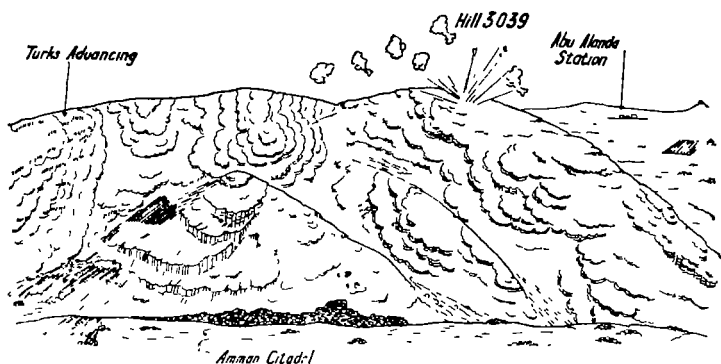
The infantry also had initial successes. In their first sweep before dawn they overran forward trenches and sangars, and captured 135 prisoners and four machine-guns. But even in the darkness the Turkish machine-gun and rifle fire, registered on the converging front of the British attack, was very effective. Chaytor found at daylight that the assault had nowhere been decisive; his men were everywhere exposed to fearful punishment at a range of only a few hundred yards. The New Zealanders were pinned down to the western end of Hill 3039, and hotly counter-attacked. The Camels were under heavy enfilade fire from both flanks, while the Turks, advancing boldly on the left of the infantry, drove the British back. Rallying finely, the Londoners returned with the bayonet and regained the lost ground. But the Turks were firm on their old positions, while everywhere the British were exhausted by their supreme endeavour over the soft, slimy ground, and were sorely reduced by casualties. By 10 a.m. it was plain that the assault had failed.

¹⁷ Lieut S. Berryman, Canterbury Mtd. Rifles. Sheep farmer; of Nelson, N.Z.; b. Waimate, N.Z., 8 Sept., 1890. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

¹⁸ Capt H. B. Hinson, Canterbury Mtd. Rifles. Duntroon graduate; b. Pleasant Point, South Canterbury, N.Z., 30 March, 1894. Died of wounds, 30 March, 1918.

¹⁹ Lieut H. Benson, Canterbury Mtd. Rifles. Telegraphist; b. Liverpool, Eng., 16 Nov., 1880. Died of wounds, 31 March, 1918.

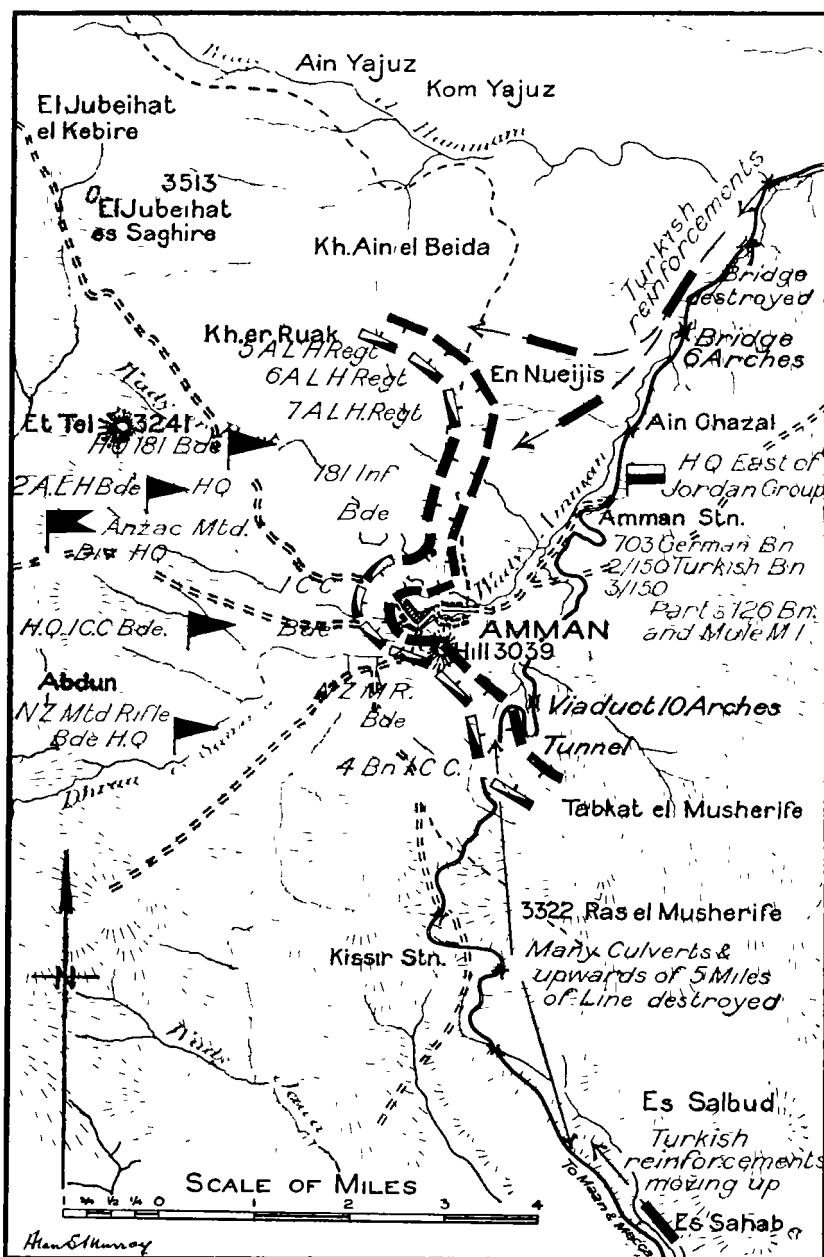
On the extreme right a stout advance had been made by Australians of the 4th Camel Battalion under Mills. Striking in between Hill 3039 and the railway, they rushed three ridges in the darkness, but were then soundly held. Daylight found them lying out in an exposed position, with only scattered rocks to protect them from a deluge of high explosive and shrapnel. During the day the Turks launched a determined counter-attack; but this was checked by a party which Mills sent out on the right, whence a cross-fire was brought to bear on the enemy's infantry. On Hill 3039 the New Zealanders were again assailed, but, adding to their own fire that of the captured machine-guns, they maintained their ground. The whole position was now serious, as one break in the erratic



Amman during Turkish counter-attack on Hill 3039 on 30th March, 1918.

British line might have led to disaster. But the chief menace to Chaytor's force was on the left, where the enemy increased his efforts to work round Ryrie's weak flank, and so cut across the communications with Es Salt. As a last throw, a company of Londoners, which had been in reserve, was ordered at 2 p.m. to attack the citadel north of the village; but this little force was caught by machine-gun fire from both flanks, and the effort was abandoned.

Soon afterwards Shea, who was at Es Salt, asked Chaytor if he considered Amman could be taken that day. The New Zealander replied with an emphatic negative. Shea then



AMMAN RAID—NIGHT ATTACK—POSITION AT DAWN, 30TH MARCH, 1918.

ordered the abandonment of the attempt on the tunnel and viaduct, and the withdrawal of the force. The decision was inevitable. Shea had sent to Amman every man who could be spared from Es Salt. Chaytor had handled his brigades with fine tactical skill. The brigade work had been good, and the regimental and battalion leadership, all in the hands of officers of long experience, had been magnificent. Every man had fought with complete confidence in both Shea and Chaytor, who were looked upon as the first divisional leaders of infantry and mounted troops in the British army in Palestine. The Turks had won, and won decisively, by their superior numbers and their position of extraordinary natural strength.

Had the Turks made a general counter-attack on the day or night of the 30th, Chaytor's withdrawal must have been extremely hazardous; but, except for sporadic advances, they remained on their ground, and soon after dark the British retirement was proceeding smoothly. Chaytor began by clearing the troops on his right flank. The New Zealanders came down in the darkness from the slopes of Hill 3039—a very ticklish movement, carried out with the skill and perfect co-operation which always marked the brigade—and withdrew across the Wady Amman. At the same time Mills led in his battalion from the extreme flank. The infantry then retired to the line from which they had moved to the assault on the night before, and the New Zealanders and Ryrie's brigade advanced a line of posts covering Amman, while the infantry and the Camels marched across the plateau to the west. By this time the morning of the 31st was well advanced, the removal of the wounded men of the New Zealanders and the Camels on the flank having occupied many hours.

The wet and cold and the marching on the sodden countryside had imposed great hardship upon all troops engaged at Amman; but the sufferings of the wounded were extreme. During the operations a number of motor-ambulances plied between the Jordan valley and Es Salt, but they were unable to traverse the soft road between Es Salt and Amman. Every seriously wounded man had therefore to be carried from Amman to Es Salt on the camel cacolets. It would be scarcely possible to devise a more acute torture for a man with mutilated limbs than this hideous form of ambulance-transport.

Even when the camels travel at a snail's pace on level ground, the wounded are horribly jolted; on country with steep gradients made slippery by rain, where the camels, fearful of falling, move irregularly, constantly sprawl, and often collapse, the agony inflicted is indescribable. "I had a rough spin," said a light horseman who, with a shattered arm, travelled by cacolet from Amman to Es Salt, "but when it seemed unbearable I reminded myself that the chap on the other stretcher on my camel had a badly broken jaw." Mills on the flank had not even sufficient camels for his wounded, and eleven men had to be tied on to horses. Beds of greatcoats, freely offered, were built up on each horse, and the wounded were placed face down with their heads to the horses' tails. Their hands were then tied under the flanks, and their feet secured in nose-bags at the front. In this fashion they were borne for twelve miles.

All through the engagement the three battalions of the Camel Brigade had fought with their usual recklessness. Their losses were sharp. Captain P. Newsam, Lieutenants Denman and Smith (2nd Battalion), Lieutenants G. E. Sanderson,²⁰ V. E. Adolph,²¹ and C. F. Thorby²² (4th Battalion), and forty men of other ranks were killed or mortally wounded; and Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Langley (1st Battalion), Major J. Day, Captain J. W. Hornby, and Lieutenant Walbank (2nd Battalion), Major L. C. Kessels,²³ Captain A. J. Watt,²⁴ Lieutenants J. C. Smith,²⁵ L. J. Williamson,²⁶ and A. G. R. Crawford²⁷ (4th Battalion), and 280 men of other ranks were wounded.

²⁰ Lieut. G. E. Sanderson, 4th (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Farmer; b. South Leith, Midlothian, Scotland, 20 Dec., 1884. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

²¹ Lieut. V. E. Adolph, 4th (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Farmer; of Auckland, N.Z.; b. Waihou, N.Z., 25 Aug., 1894. Died of wounds, 31 March, 1918.

²² Lieut. C. F. Thorby, 4th (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Butcher; of Dannevirke, N.Z.; b. Matamau, N.Z., 7 Oct., 1891. Killed in action, 30 March, 1918.

²³ Maj. L. C. Kessels, 15th L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Degilbo, Q'land; b. 7 Sept., 1890.

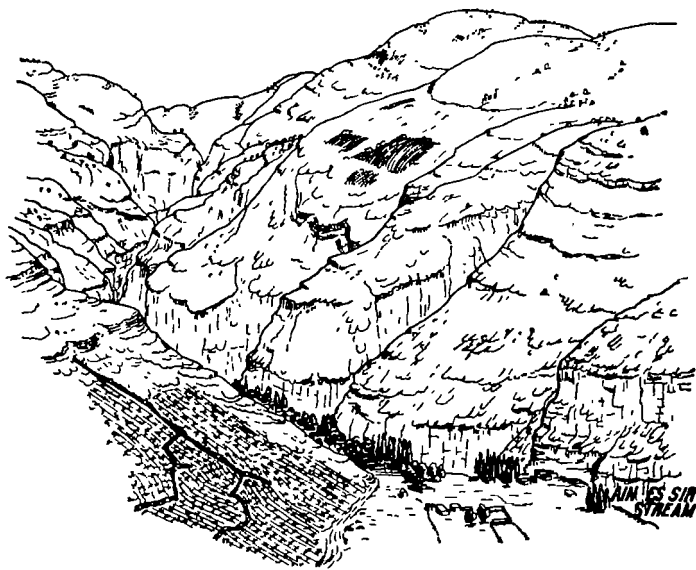
²⁴ Maj. A. J. Watt, 15th L.H. Regt. Gardener. of Wairabara, S. Aust; b. Laura, S. Aust., 1 Aug., 1891.

²⁵ Lieut. J. C. Smith, 14th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Minyip, Vic.; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 10 Feb., 1894.

²⁶ Lieut. L. J. Williamson, 15th L.H. Regt. Stenographer; of Brunswick, Melb., Vic., b. Brunswick, 24 March, 1894.

²⁷ Lieut. A. G. R. Crawford, M.C. 4th (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Sheep farmer, of Pahiatua, N.Z.; b. Weston-super-Mare, Eng., 15 Dec., 1877. Died of wounds, 9 June, 1918.

By noon the whole force, with the exception of the mounted rear-guards, was on the march. The 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade moved by the road to Es Salt, while the infantry and the Camel Brigade, followed and guarded by the New Zealanders, used the track from Ain es Sir to Shunet Nimrin, by which the New Zealanders had gone up. Early in the afternoon small bodies of Turks approached the light horse rear-guards, but were held off without trouble. As the New Zealanders rode slowly through Ain es Sir in the night, they were followed by about 500 Turks. The Circassians of the



Ain es Sir, scene of attack on the Wellington Mounted Rifles, who were rear-guard to the force withdrawing from Amman, 1st April, 1918.

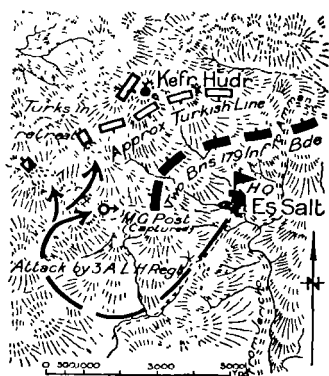
village, who had during the fighting been sulky and aloof, were fully alive to the British failure; picking up courage, they joined with a few Turks in the village and opened fire at close range upon the Wellingtons, and about a dozen of Meldrum's men were hit by the first volley. The revenge of the New Zealanders was instant and decisive. The night was wild and dark, with sleet and wind which chilled the men to

their bones. Wet, sleepless, and almost worn-out with their prolonged fighting, depressed with the sense of failure and saddened by the thought of dead comrades, they were in no temper to reward treachery with mercy. As their friends fell from the saddles, they rushed the Circassian houses, drove the civilian riflemen out, and in a few minutes had killed thirty-six of them. The retreat was not again molested. After a sorry night in the cold, the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at 1 a.m. on April 1st reached a camping-ground amid a nest of little vineyards surrounded by stone walls in the hills two miles east of Es Salt; a few hours later they continued the march through the town and down the main road to Shunet Nimrin.

As each day of the Amman fighting went by, the position at Es Salt had become increasingly disquieting. Although often attacked, the 1st and 2nd Regiments of Cox's brigade had succeeded in blocking the thrust of the Turks down the Jordan valley from the north. But the enemy, steadily drawing reinforcements across the Jordan at Jisr ed Damieh from the direction of Nablus, had pressed in on Es Salt from the west and north. Shea had only two battalions of the 179th Brigade and Bell's light horse regiment to resist this encroachment, and to prevent a march against the rear of Chaytor's force at Amman. On March 28th the Londoners covered the position from the north and north-east, while Bell was in touch with the enemy on the north-west. That day 1,000 Turkish infantry with two guns marched towards Es Salt from Damieh, and 500 more were operating against Cox's two regiments on the plain. A rise of nine feet in the Jordan had thrown two of the four bridges out of action and delayed all transport, and a great supply dump at Shunet Nimrin was disorganised by a raid of thirteen German airmen, whose bombs killed two British artillery officers and caused heavy losses among the Camels.

On the 29th the pressure at Es Salt increased, and on the 30th some 2,000 Turks were concentrated about the commanding hill-feature, Kefr Hudr, to the north. A captured Turkish officer informed the General Officer Commanding 179th Brigade that the enemy intended to attack on the night of the 30th. Bell was then ordered to take up a position on the left of the infantry, from which he could harass

the enemy's flank if the assault were made. The information proved unsound, but the precautions led to a daring and successful little exploit by the light horsemen. Moving at 1.30 on the morning of the 31st, Bell led his men for two and a half miles along the track leading to Arseniyet and, dismounting, advanced on foot over rough country to high ground close to the enemy's right. After daylight the Australians crept to within 800 yards of an enemy machine-gun post covering the Turkish flank. One troop under Lieutenant C. A. Bennetto²⁸ crawled forward to within about 100 yards of the machine-guns without being observed, and fire from three Hotchkiss guns was opened on the post by the main body. Bennetto's men then rushed the position, supported by a second troop under Lieutenant H. E. McDonald,²⁹ The Turks, surprised and demoralised, had no time to open fire before the Australians were upon them. The officer in charge and thirteen other ranks were killed, six were made prisoner, and three machine-guns captured. Prosecuting his success, Bell ordered his squadrons forward along the rear of the Turkish infantrymen, who, caught by Hotchkiss fire, left their positions and fled into the shelter of the ravines. Many Turks were shot down as they ran, and several hundreds, including 300 cavalry on the Damieh track, were driven back in confusion over a distance of four miles. Bell sent an urgent message to the British infantry commander suggesting a general advance; but the position was deemed too obscure, and the force available too weak, for a definite offensive. The light horse casualties were three men slightly wounded.



²⁸ Lieut C A Bennetto, M.C. Adjutant, 3rd L.H. Regt., 1918/19. Accountant, of Lindisfarne, Hobart, Tas.; b Hobart, 29 Oct., 1890.

²⁹ Lieut. H. E. McDonald, 3rd L.H. Regt. Stock salesman; b. Burra, N.S.W., 1881.

Bell, a sound soldier of wide vision, did not at that time share in the nervousness of the High Command as to the Es Salt position, and always maintained that the hurried evacuation of the town on April 1st was a serious mistake in tactics. Discussion of the point is purposeless. Evacuation was ordered and carried out hurriedly, and not without some appearance of a break in the British morale. Defeat and dejection were stamped on the procession of fighting men, with all their strange train of paraphernalia, which that day thronged the mountain road between Es Salt and Shunet Nimrin. The sense of failure was also sharply accentuated by the unhappy multitude of terrified Armenians and other Christian peoples who fled from Es Salt down the track with the horsemen and infantry. The rejoicing which had followed the British occupation of the town had been succeeded, as the indecisive days of Amman dragged on, by uneasiness, then by fear, and, when the British withdrawal became known, by panic. The Moslems of the town had watched with sullen disapproval the happy demonstrations of the Christians; and now that the Turks had prevailed, all those who had rejoiced and had shown sympathy with the Londoners and the light horsemen feared for their property, their women, and their lives. Up till then they had during the war been spared outrage. Now they feared that the blow would fall, and on the night of the 31st a great many Christians packed up all that they could carry to the Jordan, and prepared for flight. Before dawn the leaders of this tragic, motley throng of aged men and women, of parents and families—even to babies in arms—of rich and poor, rough and gentle, were far down the road. Some had camels and donkeys of burden, some drove their sheep, but most walked heavily laden. The night was wet and cold; the following day was marked by heavy showers; the road was steep and narrow, flooded and rough. They pressed on, at first strong and confident in the thought of the British troops behind, afterwards exhausted and sore-footed, and with their terror increasing as battalion after battalion, regiment after regiment, marching swiftly past, left them, as they believed, to the mercy of their fanatical enemies. The light horsemen, moved by their plight, lifted women and children up and placed them in front of their saddles; not a

few dismounted, worn as they were, and allowed the wretched fugitives to ride their horses. At every bend in the steep mountain track stood insolent and truculent Arabs, taking a devilish delight in the strange and tragic procession, and firing their rifles into the air—a favourite pastime with these natives when moved by deep excitement. Still more distressing was the condition of the British wounded. A large advanced dressing-station had been established at Es Salt, and when the nervous speed at which the evacuation was undertaken overtaxed the capacity of the motor-ambulances, a large number of victims of the fighting had to make the journey down the mountain-side in the ghastly camel cacolets. The road was very greasy, and on the steep gradients the camels frequently fell. The morning was made hideous with the groans of the wounded.

By the afternoon of April 2nd the whole force had gained the Jordan valley. Leaving the 180th Infantry Brigade to hold a bridgehead at Ghoraniye, Shea withdrew his men, less the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, to the west side of the Jordan. Despite the complications caused by the floods, the hastily-thrown bridges had proved equal to the enormous traffic during the week's operations. The magnitude of the transport required for the supply of a few brigades of men engaged a long distance from the railway, was shown by the fact that no less than 30,000 animals recrossed the bridges during the withdrawal.

Defeat is rarely admitted during the progress of a campaign. The British War Office proclaimed to the world that the Amman raid was successful, and emphasis was laid on the destruction of the few miles of railway on the level country south of the position. But General Shea made no attempt to disguise his failure. "The objects of the raid on the Hejaz railway," he said, in his report written a fortnight later, "were the destruction of the tunnel and viaduct, of Amman station itself, and of the railway for some distance north and south of that place. Adverse weather conditions and the opposition encountered prevented these objects from being completely attained." The simple truth was that, with the tunnel and viaduct still sound, the damage done to the line

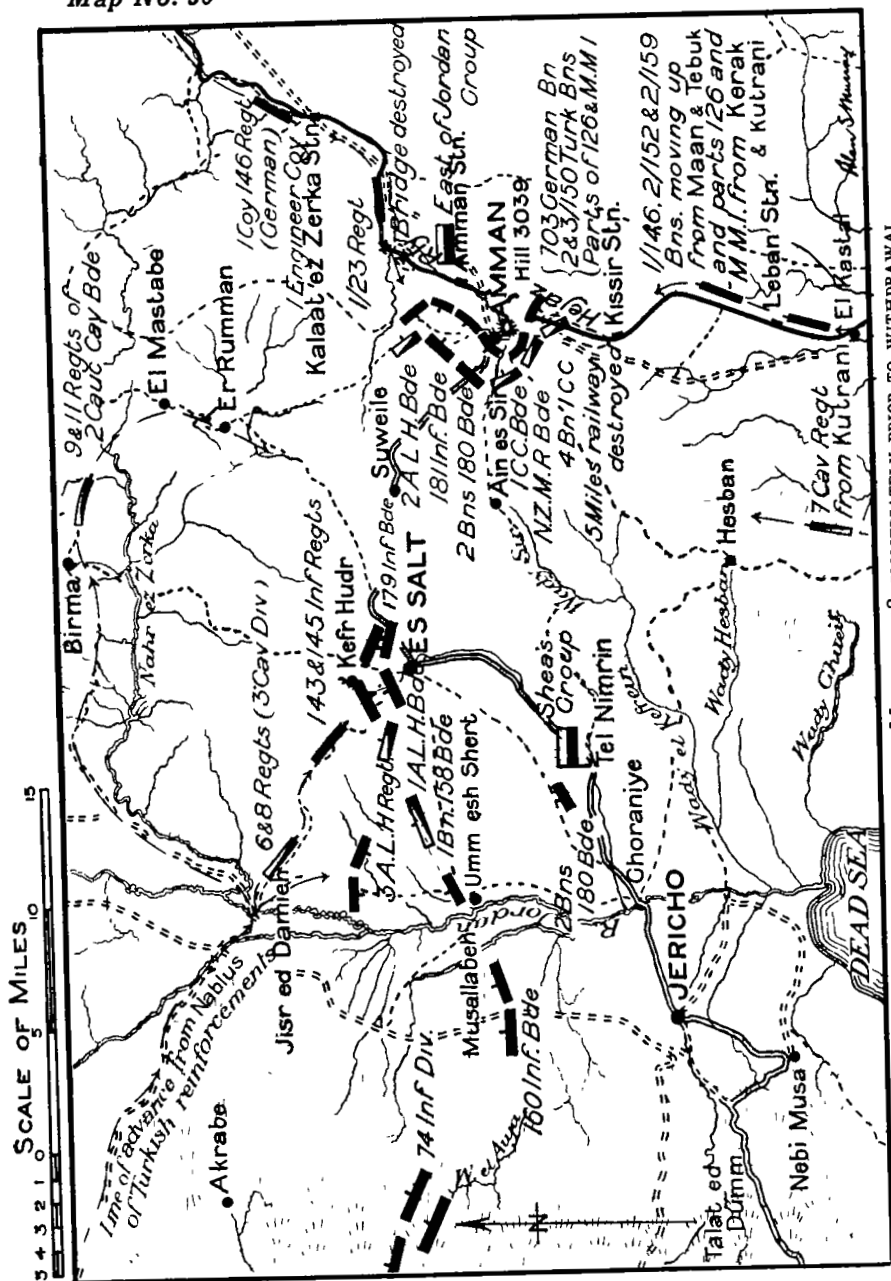
was trifling and of very little embarrassment to the enemy. The failure was expensive. The casualties were:

			Officers.	Other ranks.
Anzac Mounted Division (including the Camel Brigade):				
Killed	..	..	11	107
Wounded	..	..	40	511
Missing	..	..	2	53
			<hr/>	<hr/>
			53	671
British Infantry:				
Killed	..	..	4	55
Wounded	..	..	23	324
Missing	..	..	2	68
			<hr/>	<hr/>
			29	447
			<hr/>	<hr/>
Total for the force	..	..	82	1,118
			<hr/>	<hr/>

Turkish casualties, excluding prisoners, were estimated at 350 killed and 900 wounded; while the Anzacs and Camels captured 10 officers and 318 other ranks, and the infantry 10 officers and 277 other ranks.

Until the fight at Amman the light horse had lost very few prisoners to the enemy. In the whole campaign from the Canal to Aleppo the total did not exceed eighty. When the men of the 6th Regiment who went over the crest with Ridgway during the attack on the 28th did not return, the depression among the Australians was profound. During all the war this was the blackest incident in Ryrrie's brigade. From the Canal to Amman not a single officer of the light horse had fallen alive into Turkish hands, and young Ridgway's fate had therefore a sharp significance to the Australians. The Turks, however, did not report his capture; and when at the end of September the Anzacs under Chaytor returned to Amman and won it, the officers of the 2nd Brigade organised a search for the missing man. Ridgway's body was found where he had fallen at the head of his troopers. The unique record was unbroken. No light horse officer was captured during the war.

Map No. 30



AMMAN RAID—POSITION ON 30TH MARCH, 1918, IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO WITHDRAWAL.

Troops feel some failures more sharply than others, and the measure of regret and resentment has very little to do with the previous prospects of success. Amman was almost a hopeless enterprise, and all ranks might have accepted defeat without any suspicion of reproach. But the Australians and New Zealanders felt their reverse on the bleak tableland more deeply than any other reverse in the long war, with the single exception of Gallipoli. They fretted constantly over the men they had left behind among the prowling, ghoulisn Arabs on that wild, alien territory. The sentiment of the veteran soldier concerning his dead comrades is always stronger when the dead remain with the enemy; and every Australian and New Zealander who fought at Amman prayed for the day when he would fight there again. Few, too, as they marched back to the valley, but pondered on the brave men of London who had gone to their deaths down the slopes leading to that bulwark of ancient Rome. Riding along in the darkness to Es Salt, a light horse officer noticed a man with a spare blanket wrapped about his knees. "Picked it up, did you?" he said. "You were luckier than I was. I saw one lying on the ground as we pulled out from Amman, and jumped off to get it. Somebody, as he passed, had laid it over a dead Londoner."

The 1st and 2nd Regiments of Cox's brigade, in holding back the Turks north of the Umm esh Shert track during the Amman operations, were not involved in heavy fighting. They had, however, been constantly harassed by superior enemy forces, and shelled from guns on the high ground at Mafid Jozele beside the Jordan a few miles north of the Shert crossing. Their front was finally extended from the river across the valley and up on to the plateau; and, as they were then holding their front very lightly, a battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers was sent up in support. The Inverness and Ayrshire Batteries were driven up behind the light horsemen, and their good shooting had a steadying effect upon the enemy; one of the armoured-car batteries was also acting in the area, and the enemy advance down the valley, feared by Shea, was never seriously pressed. Cox's losses were trifling, and, when on April 2nd the brigade was withdrawn to the west of the Jordan, the regiments were still relatively fresh.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GHORANIYE AND MUSALLABEH

CHAYTOR was now given command of all the Jordan valley defences. Cox's brigade, with the 5th Australian Light Horse Regiment attached, recrossed the river and relieved the infantry in the Ghoraniye bridgehead, where the Australians had the support of the Ayrshire, Inverness, and Somerset Batteries, two batteries of 4.5-inch howitzers, and two heavy guns. The Camel Brigade took over the line of hill-posts at Abu Tellul and along the Wady Mellahah, with the 6th and 7th Regiments, which were temporarily attached to Smith's command, in support.

Each day the enemy appeared in considerable numbers on the plain and foot-hills east of Ghoraniye bridgehead, and in front of the Mellahah and Musallabeh positions to the north. But, although he was plainly stimulated by his success at Amman, he was not yet ready to attack, and the Australians everywhere worked hard to build up the defence of their three positions. All were naturally strong. The bridgehead at Ghoraniye was triangular in shape, with its base, about two miles long on the river, and an extreme depth to the east of about one mile and three-quarters. Immediately across the river the ground of the bridgehead for a few hundred yards was low-lying and covered with scrub, after which it opened out to a little half-circle of firm clay country with bushes in patches. Beyond that rose a ring of the white clay-hills which flank so much of the course of the Jordan. These hills, although only a few hundred feet high, were steep and close-packed; on the east they sloped to a plain covered by light scrub, which extended to the foot-hills of the range behind. At the southern end of the bridgehead the line of the 1st Light Horse Regiment under Granville joined the Jordan at a spot where the hills bent in to the river, the trenches terminating on a bluff about 200 feet directly above the water. Round the rough semi-circle the defences followed the clay-hills, which, although easy to dig, provided firm and clean-cut earthworks.

On the eastern side, where the line was held by the 2nd

Regiment under Bourne, the trenches were broken by the Wady Nimrin, a clear little permanent stream which traversed the mud-hills in a narrow cut through a wide, level floor. Almost in the centre of the floor, however, stood a single abrupt knoll with a shoulder linking it with the hills on the northern side. On this, which was afterwards known as "The Pimple," Bourne established a strong-post with a communication trench running north, and the light horsemen from a height of about 150 feet looked straight up the wide, clear bed of the Nimrin. Returning to the Jordan on the northern side, the line had a secure flank in a stagnant, scrubby swamp. The trenches were clearly visible to the enemy; he should also have been able to discover the strong covering curtains of barbed-wire which the Australians had built at speed. Heavy artillery fire would have played havoc with the soft earthworks, but the enemy had only a few guns east of Jordan, and those the batteries supporting Cox from the western side of the river were able to keep at a distance. When the wiring was completed, and the machine-gun position sited, the defence was a particularly strong one. Every rifleman in the bridgehead had an ideal zone of fire.

On the western side of the Jordan the country northwards along the Wady Mellahah was not dissimilar to that at Ghoraniye. Mud-hills overlooking exposed plain country were again the essential feature of the defences, but the line extended for several miles, and the posts were somewhat scattered and not connected up. Each, however, covered the other, and the 4th Camel Battalion (Australian and New Zealand), taking over the ground from the infantry, soon had the position secure. From the Mellahah posts to Musallabeh on the foot-hills was the already-mentioned gap in the line, across a level stretch of plain and marsh, which at this time was patrolled by troops of the 6th and 7th Light Horse Regiments.

Langley, with the 1st Camel Battalion (Australian), held Musallabeh and the adjoining posts. Musallabeh, a rough hump about 400 yards long and from 150 to 200 yards across, extending from south-east to north-west, rose sharply to a height of 400 feet from the plain. On the valley side it had a fine sweep of fire; but immediately to the north

where the Turks were active, the country was broken by many wadys, which promised complete cover to an enemy advancing that way. From Musallabeh a series of detached posts carried the line into the hills. Later on all these posts were wired, and worked up into features of sound strength; but when Langley took them over from the infantry early in April, very little had been done to improve them. The rocks on Musallabeh made digging impossible except in patches; the only defence was in stone sangars which were exposed to enemy shell-fire, and in the protection of the rocky outcrops.

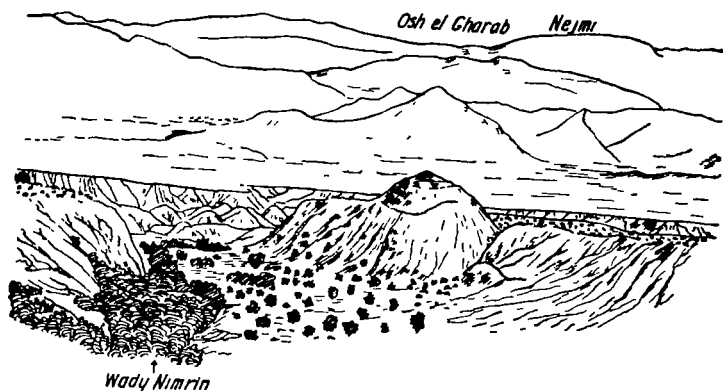
A week's hard work on the three sectors satisfied the brigadiers and Chaytor that the valley was proof against any force the enemy was likely to bring to the attack. And so it proved. Before dawn on the morning of the 11th the Turks assaulted both at Ghoraniye and Musallabeh, and in each place after hard fighting were beaten off with heavy losses. At the bridgehead the advance was made along the Wady Nimrin. At that time Bourne, with the 2nd Regiment, was holding two sectors astride the wady. Granville was on the right, the 5th Regiment of Ryrie's brigade on the left, and the 3rd in reserve. At 4.30 a.m. on the 11th one of the light horse mounted patrols—which had been active by day and night on the open country in front of the bridgehead—came into contact with a Turkish patrol near an old hut on the left bank of the Wady Nimrin. Shots were exchanged, and Bourne and brigade headquarters were at once told of the approach of the enemy. A few minutes later about 100 Turks were seen advancing along either side of the wady. At first the movement was taken to be a reconnaissance in force; but dawn disclosed successive waves of infantry in extended formation pressing forward about 1,000 strong, on a front of 600 yards, with their centre on the water-course.

In the semi-darkness, and with scattered bushes for cover, the Turks were able to advance to very close quarters before they presented a good target to the eager Australians in the trenches. Bourne wisely advised his two squadron-leaders, Captain S. N. McLean¹ and Major W. J. Brown,² to reserve

¹ Capt. S. N. McLean, 2nd L.H. Regt. Licensed surveyor and engineer; b. Bowral, N.S.W., 13 June, 1883.

² Col. W. J. Brown, D.S.O., V.D. 2nd L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Wellcamp, Toowoomba, Q'land, 17 Nov., 1872. Died, 23 March 1938.

their fire and conceal their strength as much as possible, and the first enemy line was permitted to come within 100 yards of the wire before the machine-guns and Hotchkiss guns were suddenly brought into play. The light horsemen from their heights had an extraordinary mastery over the ground now thickly covered by the Turks, who, caught at close range, fell thickly. Here and there a few men reached the wire—which was evidently a complete surprise to them—before they were shot down. Bourne had asked at dawn for artillery co-operation, and a forward observation officer took up an unrivalled position in the post on The Pimple. By 6 a.m. two 60-pounders



Ghoraniye bridgehead, showing "The Pimple," from the line of the Turkish advance.

and the three Royal Horse batteries were in action. From The Pimple the officer observing was able to give very exact corrections, and the shooting was terrible in its precision against men without any material cover. Cameron's 5th Regiment on the left could also bring destructive enfilade fire to bear on the wavering Turks; and, raked and shattered on the deadly plain, the lines broke and the men from either side fled for the shelter of the wady. Cox was now forward with Bourne, directing the fight. At this stage the enemy force was estimated at about 2,000, all within easy range of the Australian trenches, and all dominated by the artillery.

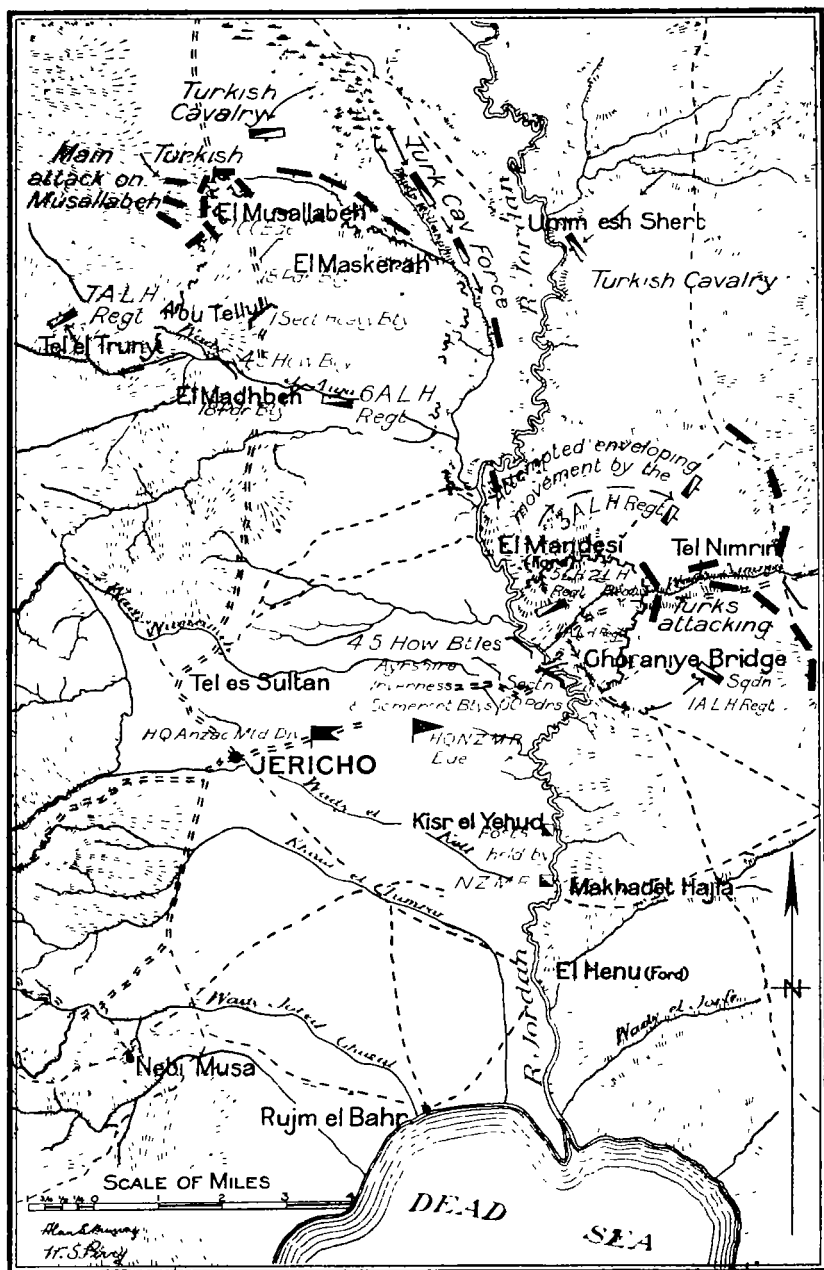
Nevertheless the Turks, who were stiffened by the leader-

ship of a few German officers, did not abandon their disastrous effort. They had brought forward nine machine-guns, and these, placed in bays of the wady where they could not be reached by British shell-fire, streamed bullets on the light horse parapets, especially on The Pimple. Indirect fire was also laid on to Cox's rear positions, where one of the casualties was Major A. Chisholm,³ the capable brigade-major, who was severely wounded in the neck. As the attack developed, Bourne was reinforced by a squadron of the 3rd Regiment with two machine-guns. The machine-guns were at once put into the line, but the squadron was held in reserve; and Bourne's Queenslanders, now confident of holding the position, fought the engagement right through unassisted, except for the enfilade fire of the 5th on their left. As the day advanced, the heat became very severe; the water-bottles of the Turks were soon exhausted, and their sufferings after their night march and rough handling became acute. When they took shelter in the wady, the fire of the light horsemen and the artillery became so deadly that they were shut up in the rough bays along the banks, some yards from the little stream of fresh water. For a time men tried to gain the stream; but they were shot down as they appeared, and throughout the afternoon they thirsted with the sparkling water so near before their eyes.

Shortly before 1 p.m. Cox ordered the 3rd Regiment from the left, and a squadron of the 1st from the right, to ride out on to the plain, in an attempt to envelop the enemy and effect a substantial capture. But the Turks were found in depth right back to the foot-hills, and were strong in machine-guns. The mounted men were therefore unable to get to close quarters, and the enemy remained on his advanced position. During the night moving lights appeared, and, with sounds of activity about the wadys, made a renewal of the attack seem probable; but at 4 a.m. on the 12th the main body had withdrawn. Pursuing, the light horsemen captured part of the rear-guard. The bridgehead was never again assaulted.

Examination of the enemy's ground in and about the wady disclosed the effectiveness of the light horse and artillery

³ Lieut.-Col. A. Chisholm, D.S.O., O.B.E., V.D. G.S.O. (2) Aust. Mtd. Div. 1918/19. Company manager, of Gympie, Q'land b. Brisbane, Q'land, 8 Dec., 1878.



THE FIGHTING AT GHORANIYE AND MUSALLABEH, 11TH-12TH APRIL, 1918.

shooting. One hundred and fifty-one enemy dead were counted; the wounded removed were estimated at 500; and ninety prisoners were taken, in addition to a few Arabs and Armenians. Bourne's casualties were six killed and seventeen wounded. One of the British observation officers at The Pimple was mortally wounded while fearlessly exposing himself in directing the fire of the batteries. The highly successful defence was due in the main to the cool and complete control of the position from the outset by Bourne and his squadron-leaders McLean and Brown, to the habitual fine shooting of the light horsemen in a crisis, to the prompt and effective co-operation of the artillery, and to the admirable manner in which Lieutenant A. C. Kemp,⁴ of the machine-gun squadron, handled his guns.

When the attack was launched, a troop of light horsemen under Lieutenant H. A. Weller⁵ was completing the wiring in front of the sector. As the Turks opened fire at close range, the men skipped through the wire so deftly that its protective value seemed but slight, and the incident caused much laughter among the riflemen on the parapets behind. No situation, however tense, could suppress the humour of these happy fighters.

The aim of the Turks that morning was evidently to regain the whole western end of the valley, or at least to capture the Jordan crossings and the Wady Auja towards the north. Allenby's foresight in advancing to the high ground beyond Abu Tellul and to the course of the Mellahah, so as to deny the fine stream of the Auja to the enemy, was now on the approach of summer richly rewarded. The Turks west of the Jordan, holding a line away from the river, were on relatively waterless country; the British on the Mellahah and Musallabeh sectors had all the best of the ground. On the morning of the 11th, when the Turks assaulted the Ghoraniye bridgehead, they also made a very determined attack upon Langley's men on Musallabeh, which, in its isolation, offered a definite artillery target. Beginning in the darkness at 4 a.m., the enemy put down a heavy barrage on

⁴ Lieut A. C. Kemp, 1st Aust. M G. Sqn. Overseer; of "Launceston," Prairie, Q'land, b. Canterbury, Kent, England, 1890. Died of wounds, 14 Apr., 1918.

⁵ Lieut H. A. Weller, 2nd L H. Regt. Insurance clerk; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Gympie, Q'land, 15 Apr., 1889.

the hill, and at the same time his infantry crept up the wadys for the assault. At 5 a.m. the guns ceased, and the Australians were at once rushed by greatly superior numbers of Turks, who were already within bombing distance.

The only zone of effective fire for the defenders was the immediate forward slope of the knoll, but, as soon as the Camels showed themselves above their covering of rocks and stones, they were shot at by the supports stationed behind the enemy's advanced line. For three hours an intricate fight was waged at very close quarters. So near was the enemy that at times the Australians, when they ran out of ammunition, hurled stones down at him. But although sorely pressed, the Camels never lost control of a critical situation. The men were loosely scattered about the hill wherever cover offered, and Captain E. H. W. Mills,⁶ commanding No. 2 Company, and Lieutenant J. R. B. Love,⁷ of No. 4 Company, moved fearlessly from party to party, giving to the force the example and stimulus which it needed. When Mills was wounded, his place was taken by Lieutenant A. A. Mackenzie.⁸ At about 8 a.m. the attack died away, except for continuous sniping and artillery, until late in the afternoon, when it was hotly renewed. Again, however, the Camels, who had been reinforced by a British company of the No. 2 Battalion, wore down the enemy, and the attempt was abandoned at nightfall. Next morning Langley's men counted 170 enemy dead in front of their position. Among the Australians, Lieutenant A. R. Nield⁹ and seventeen men were killed, and Captain Mills, Lieutenants Matthews and H. L. D. Malcolm, and twenty-four men were wounded. As at Ghoraniye, the Australians had won by the steadiness of their leadership, their perfect fire-discipline, and their straight shooting. This day's good work, coming after the failure at Amman, greatly cheered all troops.

Meanwhile the Commander-in-Chief had been preparing

⁶ Maj. E. H. W. Mills, M.C. 14th L.H. Regt. Accountant; b Chatswood, Sydney, N.S.W., 15 Jan., 1896.

⁷ Lieut. J. R. B. Love, M.C., D.C.M. 14th L.H. Regt. Missionary, of Strathalbyn, S. Aust.; b. Killeter, Ireland, 16 June, 1889.

⁸ Capt. A. A. Mackenzie, M.C. 14th L.H. Regt. Station hand; b. Greta, N.S.W. 12 Apr., 1891.

⁹ Lieut. A. R. Nield 1st (Anzac) Bn., Imp. Camel Corps. Clerk; of Unley, Adelaide, S. Aust.; b. Crystal Brook, S. Aust., 11 Aug., 1890. Killed in action, 11 Apr., 1918.

for a dashing little operation on the plain of Sharon to the west. The infantry on the right of XX Corps, which was holding the coastal sector, was to advance on a front of twelve miles from the foot-hills up into Samaria. It was hoped that this advance would force open a gap in the enemy's line on the edge of the plain. Through this gap the Australian Mounted Division, which had been brought up in readiness, was to make a rapid mounted advance, and, striking north and then swinging west towards the coast, was to envelop the Turks, together with a large number of guns placed opposite the British line close to the sea. The enterprise gave Hodgson's brigades promise of spirited and hazardous work, and the light horsemen expectantly awaited the result of the infantry attack. Owing to remarkable slackness, however, Allenby's intention, which was discussed in detail everywhere from the front line to Cairo, appears to have been fully known to the enemy. The advance of the infantry was stoutly contested. In places they penetrated to a distance of three miles, and captured the villages of Kefr Ain, Berukin, El Kefr, and Rafat; but the British losses were considerable, and after stern fighting against counter-attacks the project was abandoned. Allenby did not forget the carelessness and lack of secrecy, and in subsequent operations the most rigid secrecy was insisted upon and maintained.

The Amman raid, if it failed in its main purpose, which was temporarily to isolate the Turks to the south, produced a stimulating and useful effect upon the Hejaz troops about Maan. As was anticipated, the appearance of the British in the Amman-Es Salt area had compelled the withdrawal northward of considerable forces from the Maan district. "Before the raid," said General Allenby in his official despatch, "the enemy's strength in the Amman-Es Salt-Shunet Nimrin area was approximately 4,000. By the middle of April it had increased to 8,000." Many of the additional troops had crossed the Jordan from the western front at Danieh, but perhaps half of them had marched up from the south. This weakening of the forces opposed to Emir Feisal encouraged him to make a vigorous offensive against Maan; the railway was cut both north and south of the Turkish garrison, and 270 prisoners were taken, while on

April 17th the Maan station was seized. The Turks, however, could not be driven from a strong covering position, and the Arabs were obliged to evacuate. At the same time another Arab body assailed the railway some forty miles to the south, and tore up and destroyed many rails over a distance of nearly seventy miles.

Meanwhile the Turks, after their failures at Ghoraniye and Musallabeh on April 11th, had concentrated an infantry force about 5,000 strong at Shunet Nimrin, where they were actively building up a strong entrenched position in the foothills astride the road to Es Salt. The Arabs continued to plead for further British co-operation east of the river. The Turks at Shunet Nimrin were, as the British believed, dependent for communications by wheeled-transport upon the main Es Salt road, inasmuch as the track leading from the position to Ain es Sir had been found by the New Zealanders during the Amman raid to be very rough and impassable for guns. It appeared that, if Es Salt could again be seized by a rapid movement by Chauvel's horsemen, the Turks at Shunet Nimrin must be isolated; and, if vigorously attacked from the Jordan plain, they might be destroyed or captured with all their guns. The scheme was one to appeal to a leader of Allenby's strong initiative, and he decided to make the attempt about the middle of May.

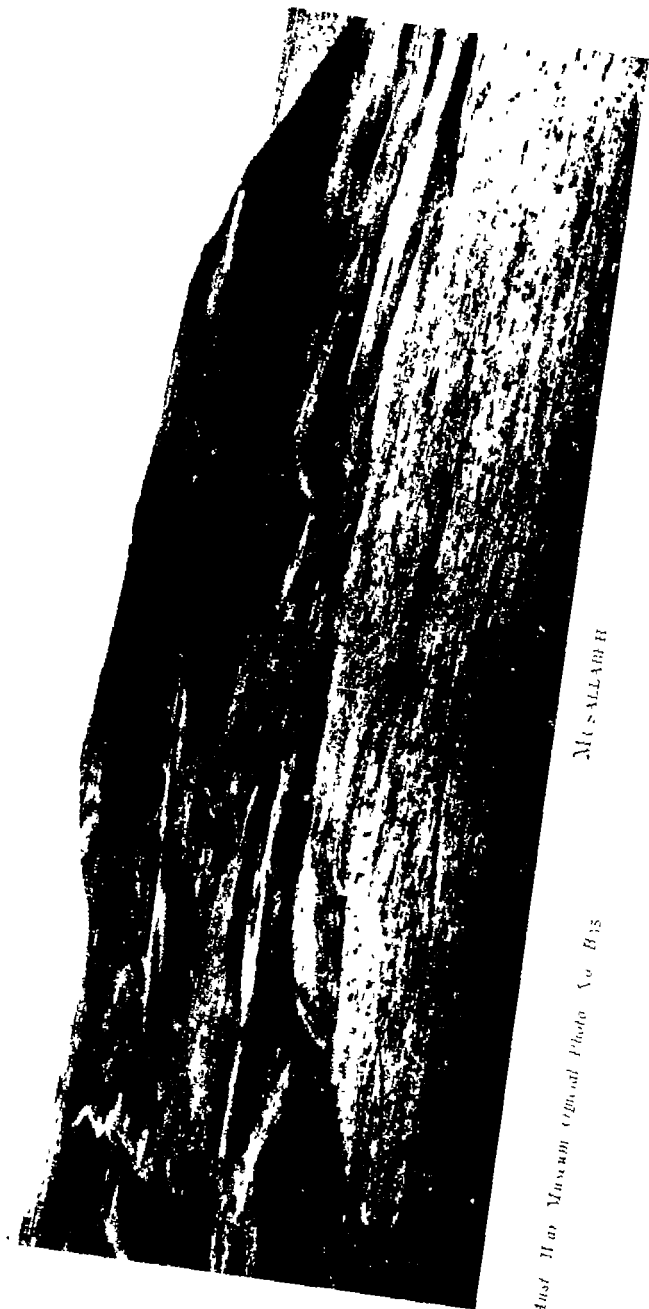
Apart from the prospect of dealing a heavy blow at the enemy, this enterprise should, if successful, have enabled the British to hold the Amman-Es Salt country until the Arabs marched up from the south, and the enemy would then have been denied the rich harvest maturing on Gilead. But about the middle of April Allenby's plan was altered. A deputation from the powerful Beni Sakr tribe of Arabs, who hold the country south of Amman, pointed out that about 7,000 fighting men of the tribe were then concentrated in arms about Madeba, some nineteen miles south-west of Amman and eighteen miles south-east of Ghoraniye. They declared their readiness to take the field against the Turks, and would gladly co-operate with the British. But, if they were to act, they must be enabled to move at once, as their provisions were running out, and very soon they would have to disperse. They assured the British leader that, if he struck at Shunet Nimrin and Es Salt, they



CLAY HILLS IN THE GHORANIE BRIDGEHEAD.

Just as Unscum Official Photo No. B9

To face p. 594



And. H. M. Museum. Original Photo No. B. 15

MUSLAMB H.

would advance north from Madeba, cross and hold the Ain es Sir track, and link up with the British troops on the tableland between Amman and Es Salt. The promise was attractive, especially in its bearing on the track to Ain es Sir, and Allenby resolved to hasten his plans and attack at the end of April. In this decision he was doubtless influenced by the failure on the plain of Sharon, which had left him with the Australian Mounted Division, after their rest of several weeks, fresh for the new operations. Plans were hastily prepared. On April 25th Chauvel established Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters on the wilderness country east of Talat ed Dumm; he was placed in command of the force, which was made up of the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions, a composite brigade of yeomanry, an Indian Imperial Service cavalry brigade (two regiments), Shea's 60th Division (less one brigade), an Indian Imperial Service infantry brigade, an extra brigade of Royal Horse Artillery, a heavy battery, a siege battery, two mountain batteries, and two batteries of light armoured cars. Smith's Camel Brigade was to co-operate from the west of the Jordan.

Hodgson, with the Australian Mounted Division, marched from his position on the plain of Sharon north of the Jaffa road across the mountains to Jordan valley. During the concentration of the British force, the Turks remained quiet on the valley fronts. The 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade continued to hold the bridgehead, where they were reinforced by one battalion of Alwar infantry. These Indians, who had not previously been actively engaged in the campaign, were introduced to the light horse lines in small parties to gain experience. They entered upon their task with the eager interest of children, proved great workers with the pick and shovel, and were disposed to lighten the labours of the light horsemen, who were already feeling the intense heat; they consequently won immediate popularity. It was interesting to observe their implicit confidence in the veteran Australian fighters, and their slavish imitation of all that the light horsemen did in the trenches, even to their attitude in repose. The Australians were quick to appreciate their good points. It was noticed that, while the Australians were far keener observers by ear at night, and could accurately identify

the cause of all movement by sound, the Indians had a superior eye for movement by day. The two races became at once very good friends, and the bond grew stronger as they fought together from that time until the close of the campaign.

On April 18th the three brigades of the Anzac Mounted Division had advanced from the bridgehead in the early morning, and engaged in a spirited demonstration against the Turkish defences of Shunet Nimrin and the foot-hills on either side. The objects of this movement, as set out in orders, were "to inflict losses on the enemy and to convey the impression that we are about to advance again to Amman." To give a realistic appearance to the operation, the 180th Infantry Brigade was on the 17th marched in daylight across the plain towards Ghoraniye. All available batteries joined in the demonstration; some advanced across the river; and armoured cars were active in advance of the bridgehead. The three mounted brigades pushed forward in spirited fashion, but everywhere found the foot-hills strongly held, and were prevented by lively fire from becoming closely engaged. On the extreme left (northern) flank Bell, with the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, was ordered to endeavour to seize some of the outlying hills, but was stoutly resisted, and made but little headway. Towards nightfall the troops were withdrawn.

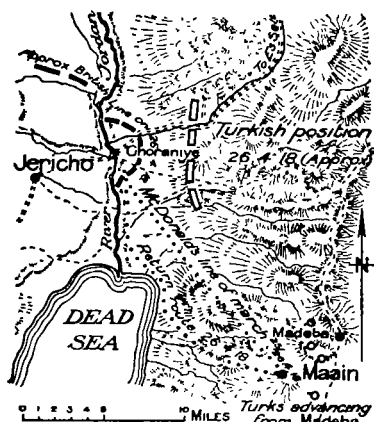
The wisdom of this day's work, which was carried out under direct orders from Allenby, was afterwards keenly debated, and probably the demonstration was afterwards regretted by the High Command. Its only useful purpose was, perhaps, to draw still more troops northwards from Maan, and so to relieve the men of the Hejaz. As against this, it led to a still heavier concentration of troops at Shunet Nimrin, and was followed by an outburst of great Turkish energy in the further improvement of the defences in that already formidable area. The general opinion was that the Commander-in-Chief had not, when the demonstration was made, definitely decided upon the second great raid into Gilead. By the end of the month, when Chauvel's hasty preparations were complete, the Turks at Shunet Nimrin were ready and confident.

On March 30th, during the fighting at Amman, Lieutenant

R. G. Sinton,¹⁰ of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment, under orders from General Shea proceeded with six men to Madeba, with despatches to the Arabs there. The long ride over strange, rough country, occupied by the enemy and by natives whose attitude was unknown, was undertaken with much zest by the little party of Australians. About half-way along the track Sinton came upon a number of Arabs with their throats cut. These men had been envoys to the British lines a few days before, and had apparently been ambushed and murdered by enemy agents. Sinton's ride, however, passed without incident. The Arabs at Madeba, many of whom saw British troops for the first time, gave the party a demonstrative welcome, loaded them with gifts, and made fulsome promises of active support to the Allied cause.

About a month later a similar enterprise was undertaken by Lieutenant Ian McDonald, intelligence officer to the 1st Light Horse Brigade. McDonald, who was accompanied by Lieutenant G. H. S. Cundy¹¹ and a troop from the 1st

Regiment, with an interpreter, an Arab guide, and two Hotchkiss guns, marched out from Ghoraniye on the night of April 25th for Maain (not to be confused with Maan on the Hejaz railway), a village a few miles south-west of Madeba. Maain was reached before dawn on the morning of the 26th, and McDonald was at first warmly greeted by the Omdah of the village. But the Arabs, when they



discovered that he commanded only thirty men, courteously but firmly requested him at once to return, as there were 150 Turks at Madeba, and the natives dared not show friendship for so weak a British force.

¹⁰ Lieut. R. G. Sinton, 2nd L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Allora, Q'land, 30 Oct., 1890.

¹¹ Capt. G. H. S. Cundy, M.C.; 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Scone district, N.S.W.; b. Tomalla, N.S.W., 17 Nov., 1888.

McDonald withdrew to a position of observation in the neighbouring hills, and fed his horses. The Turks were reported to be advancing in strength, and McDonald found concealment impossible, as the Arabs gathered round and engaged in their usual pastime of firing their rifles into the air. As the Turks closed, the Australians retired, keeping the enemy off with the Hotchkiss guns. Three of the party were wounded, but were carried down the hills in safety; and McDonald, marching north-west close to the Dead Sea, returned in the evening to Ghoraniye, convinced that the Arabs of the district would never fight for the British until they had decisively beaten the Turks.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ES SALT RAID

ON April 20th Chauvel received from the Commander-in-Chief his orders for the forthcoming operations. Allenby's project was an ambitious one. He aimed at gaining control of an area east of Jordan from the Dead Sea northwards along the Jordan to the Jisr ed Damieh crossing, thence east to Es Salt and Amman and returning by the Kissir station (south of Amman) and Madeba to the Dead Sea. This area, he estimated, then contained about 6,000 enemy of all arms. Preliminary operations were to be directed to the capture of the forces at Shunet Nimrin and Es Salt; when the country between the river and the line Jisr ed Damieh-Es Salt-Madeba had been occupied, Chauvel was to march against Amman. The Commander-in-Chief thought it "probable that during these operations considerable help may be counted upon from the Arabs, and the closest touch must be maintained with them." It was of importance that the harvest round Es Salt should be denied to the Turks during the first week in May. Chauvel, Allenby added, should make full use of the ability of his large mounted force. "Bold and rapid marches" must be made. "If the 6,000 or 7,000 enemy fighting force east of Jordan is destroyed, the Turks have no means of replacing this force except by withdrawing troops from west of Jordan"—which was a risk unlikely to be taken. Finally, Allenby disclosed his hope that the operations might develop into the decisive overthrow of the whole Turkish strength in Palestine. "As soon as your operations have gained the front Amman-Es Salt," he wrote, "you will at once prepare for operations northwards, with a view to advancing rapidly on Deraa."

The significance of a blow at Deraa is made apparent by a glance at the map of eastern Palestine. At that point the Hejaz railway threw out its western branch, which, crossing the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee, was the sole means of communication by railway between Damascus and the Turkish forces on Samaria and the plain of Sharon. The destruction of the line at Deraa, even temporarily, followed by a bold advance on Sharon and Samaria, would probably have brought

the campaign to a dramatic conclusion and led on to a British mounted advance to Damascus and Aleppo. This project, almost fantastic in its boldness, and made at a time when Allenby was being ordered by the War Office to send more and still more of his troops to France, strikingly illustrates the irrepressible spirit of aggression and confidence which distinguished the British leader. At that time the outlook in France was extremely gloomy for the Allies. The German offensive, beginning in March, had cost the British nearly a quarter of a million casualties. Owing to the lack of available men these losses had not been fully replaced, and the position was not likely to improve for some time. As usual when the Western Front was menaced, subsidiary British campaigns in other countries were ruthlessly sacrificed. The War Office cabled to Allenby on April 21st: "The only possible means at our disposal is to call on you for battalions. It is therefore hoped that you can release another fourteen battalions, in addition to the nine already mentioned, to follow as soon as shipping becomes available."

This demand reached Allenby after he had decided upon the second raid into Gilead; but, as the cable shows, he had already been called upon for nine of his battalions, knew perfectly how critical was the situation in the West, and knew, too, that an Allied disaster there would, of course, terminate the war in Palestine and everywhere else. A leader less brave and resolute might have been content, temporarily at least, to abandon the offensive; but to Allenby's mind this was the one moment for striking every blow which could shake the prestige of Germany and her Allies. The capture of the 6,000 troops in the Es Salt area, and the Turks' final loss of southern Arabia and the Holy Places, would not be without effect in Europe. If Deraa could be seized, the Palestine campaign brought to a sudden close, and the advance continued to Aleppo—as would then be possible for the mounted troops—the Turks in Mesopotamia would be isolated, and their collapse made certain. All this was possible to a man of Allenby's driving force, and was achieved by him a few months later. But, had it been accomplished in May, the story of the war from then to its close must have been very different.

But although Allenby thought of Deraa at that time, it is clear that he did not seriously look for such a development of the raid. A swift and complete Turkish collapse east of the river would have made the dash possible, and his reference to the vital railway junction was merely intended to point that out to Chauvel.

Chauvel's scheme for the raid was bold and simple. Shea's Londoners, who were to make the frontal attack at Shunet Nimrin, and the Australian Mounted Division were to cross into the Ghoraniye bridgehead after nightfall on April 29th, to be in readiness for the advance on Es Salt at dawn. On the previous night Ryrie, crossing with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Ghoraniye, had marched south down the east bank of the Jordan, and had re-established a bridgehead at Makhadet Hajla, from which the Australians, supported by Indian detachments, were to operate on the right flank of the infantry attack at Shunet Nimrin. A strong factor in the failure at Amman a month before had been the Turkish regiments which had crossed the Jordan from the direction of Nablus at Jisr ed Damieh. Allenby did not anticipate that the enemy could now detach many troops from his western front; he expected the fight at Shunet Nimrin to be a swift and decisive affair, all over before the enemy could send supports. But as a preliminary measure Chauvel resolved to seize the Damieh crossing and deny it to the enemy. This task was allotted to the 4th Light Horse Brigade under Grant, who, while the Londoners fell on the position at Shunet Nimrin, was to gallop up the valley on the east of the river at dawn on the morning of the 30th. Grant was to be closely followed by Wilson's 3rd Light Horse Brigade, which was to assist, if necessary, in winning the ground at Damieh, and then, swinging up the Damieh-Es Salt track, to ride with all speed on Es Salt. The 5th Mounted Brigade, following after Wilson from Ghoraniye, was to strike at Es Salt by the Umm esh Shert track, which had been followed by Bell in the previous raid. Having won the town, Hodgson was to send a mounted force down the main road from Es Salt to Shunet Nimrin to take the Turks in rear, and to cut off their retreat when they had been forced back by the Londoners. Anzac Mounted Division, with the exception of the 2nd Brigade at Makhadet Hajla, was

at the outset to remain in support of the 60th Division in the valley.

The brigades of the Australian Mounted Division moved from their camps north of Jericho soon after dark on the evening of the 29th. They left all tents standing, and camp-fires and lights burning as usual. The dust was deep in the valley, and the regiments rode through choking clouds towards the river. The London battalions had already crossed, and the light horsemen, as they advanced through the bridgehead to a temporary halting-ground on the north, passed the waiting infantry standing silently in their fours. Amman had brought home to the Australians the sharp contrast between the lot of horsemen and that of infantry in an operation which imposed long and heavy marching; and when this night in the bridgehead they smothered the gallant Cockneys in dust, and thought of the grim frontal attack which was before them at Shunet Nimrin, their hearts went out to them in sympathy and admiration. The mounted men got hard fighting in plenty; but at worst there was always a sporting and exhilarating side to their campaigning, which was lacking to the foot-marching and the plain, more or less brute-force, tactics of the infantry.

Shortly before dawn Hodgson's division was ready to move, and the 4th Brigade, with the 4th Regiment leading in open "artillery" formation, began to ride up the plain. Already the Londoners were closing in upon the Turkish trenches about the foot-hills. Further south Onslow, with a force made up of his own 7th Regiment, one squadron of the Hyderabad Lancers, a battalion of the Patiala infantry, the 20th Brigade of Royal Horse Artillery, and a section of machine-guns, had at 2 a.m. attacked the Turkish left at Kabr Mujahid, and Kabr Said. The demonstration only partially served its purpose, for although the enemy heavily shelled the positions occupied, he made no effort to divert his infantry against them.

Meanwhile, as Grant's brigade rode north through a belt of scrub which reached the horses' withers, they heard, just as dawn began to show, a sudden burst of bombing on their right under the dark shadow of the mountain, and knew that the Londoners had begun their stern work in the foot-hills.

The bombing was followed almost instantly by shafts of machine-gun fire; and then the noise, gathering into a roar of small-arm fire, told that the fight was raging. The enemy had at the outset been taken completely by surprise; the 60th, silently rushing the outposts, had burst with their bombs into a camp behind, where they killed many Turks. But before they had won any of the main defences, the enemy garrison was awakened and ready; the outlying trenches and strong-posts were cleverly concealed in the crops of bearded wheat, and the Londoners suffered severely as they endeavoured to get to close quarters.

The eastern side of the Jordan valley, from the Wady Nimrin up to the track from Jisr ed Damieh to Es Salt, a distance of fifteen miles, offered no serious natural obstacles to rapid mounted movement. Immediately north of the Wady Nimrin the plain is some five miles wide; further north it is narrowed down by the encroachment of the foot-hills on the east and the mud-hills along the river; and beyond the Umm esh Shert track a high feature, known as "Red Hill," juts out from the Jordan and dominates the plain. Grant's brigade (which was supported by the Notts Battery and by the "A" and "B" Horse Batteries of the Honourable Artillery Company), moving while it was still dark, was quickly extended on a wide front covering nearly the whole of the plain. Enemy fire was expected from guns opposed to Smith's Camel Brigade on the west side of the river, but was not greatly feared. If Grant was stopped—as he could easily have been—it would be with machine-gun and rifle fire from the foot-hills of Gilead on his right, or from Red Hill and the mud-hills on his left, at one of the narrow places through which his horsemen had to pass. Even a brief delay would have warned the Fourth Turkish Army Headquarters at Es Salt, and would have roused a stiff opposition on the tracks leading up to Gilead from Umm esh Shert and Jisr ed Damieh. Chauvel's whole scheme therefore depended upon the element of surprise. That surprise was absolute. The Turks were prepared at Shunet Nimrin, but had not given a thought to the possibility of a dash up to the plain. A thin line of posts, lightly held, extended across the plain from El Haud to the Umm esh

Shert ford; but these offered no resistance, and were ridden over by Grant's advance-guard.

For about a mile the horsemen rode slowly through the high, dense scrub, but at daylight the ground cleared and the pace was increased from a walk to a trot. The horsemen were now disclosed to the enemy gunners on Red Hill and to the west of the river; these had already been aroused by the firing at Shunet Nimrin, and shrapnel began to burst over the scattered squadrons. One of the first shots maimed Grant's horse; but a change was soon made, and the advance quickened in speed until the brigade was clattering along at a hand-gallop. As the gun-fire increased, each troop and each individual man instinctively drew apart, until the galloping brigade, spread out over the whole floor of the valley, presented a picture from which all formation or control seemed suddenly to have departed. On either flank, where the men rode on ground broken with many wadys, this apparent chaos was intensified. The horses, excited by the shells, fought strongly for their heads; about their bodies and necks nosebags stuffed with feed, bundles of rations, reserves of canteen stores and firewood, quart-pots, and spare bandoliers, bounced and pounded, until many of even the most expertly tied knots were loosened, and the plain was strewn with every kind of light horseman's campaigning possessions. The safety of galloping horses in open formation under shell-fire was never more strikingly demonstrated. In the long gallop only six men were killed and seventeen wounded.

With the screen of the 4th Regiment setting a gallant pace, the brigade went on until the Damieh-Es Salt track had been reached and crossed. Over the last two or three miles the fire had slackened, the guns having been turned on to Wilson's brigade as it followed; and Grant's regiments wheeled unmolested to the left and pressed in on a line astride the track through the mud-hills towards the ford. As the pace was steadied, order returned as by a miracle to the brigade, and each troop and squadron in a few minutes found itself complete and again in fighting order.

Grant took up his headquarters on the foot-hills at a point where the track began its ascent, and waited anxiously for reports from the regiments probing for the Jordan. The

advance-guard of the 4th Regiment had pushed north as far as the great Nahr ez Zerka (or, as it is better known, the Wady Yabbok) which drains the eastern tableland, from beyond the Hejaz railway, and falls into the Jordan about a mile and a half north of the Damieh crossing. Here good water was found. A squadron then endeavoured to work down the wady towards the bridge, but was held up by unexpected opposition, and was forced later in the day to fall back for two miles. Two squadrons of the 12th were also stopped as they attempted to push on to the bridge by the Es Salt track. As the screens advanced, they found the mud-hills bolder and the passages deeper than they were further south, and soon progress was confined to a few broad winding wady passages studded with large bushes. Enemy resistance quickly developed along the whole front, and the light horsemen were checked and held when still a mile and a half from the stream. They were then spread over a line eight miles in length, with both flanks exposed; and, as they were not within sight of the ford, they could offer no resistance to the crossing of enemy troops from the west.

But, although the position was not altogether satisfactory, Grant was astride the track and in a position to resist an enemy advance unless it was made in overwhelming numbers. At 6.30 a.m. Wilson came up with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade. After a brief conference between the brigadiers, in which Grant expressed the opinion that he could hold his ground, Wilson began to climb to Es Salt by the road from the Damieh crossing. The track as it leaves the plain rises sharply, and for a mile or two the regiments went up, leading their horses in single file. Wheeled-transport was impracticable, but Wilson was supported by six guns of the Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery, carried, together with their ammunition, on a train of 360 camels. Twenty-nine camel cacolets for the wounded completed the column. Each man carried 230 rounds of ammunition, while for each Hotchkiss gun there were 3,100 rounds, and for each machine-gun of the machine-gun squadron, 5,000 rounds.

Grant's line—if line it could be called, seeing how the squadrons and troops were scattered, and in the rough mud-hills had very little contact—then extended from the Zerka in

the north, towards Red Hill in the south. Further efforts to gain the river and establish a definite bridgehead proved unsuccessful. The three batteries were pushed in until they were able to cover the bridge at Damieh and the track leading down from the hills on the west side; but the range was extreme, the targets indefinite, and the defensive power of the guns small. As the day wore on, the weakness of the brigade's position became increasingly clear to the three regimental leaders, and Grant himself was frankly uneasy. The weak spot was at Red Hill, behind which (as was afterwards disclosed) the enemy was at that time throwing a pontoon bridge across the river. Smith's Camel Brigade on the west had been ordered to demonstrate strongly while the light horse moved up the valley in the morning. Red Hill was to have been vigorously shelled, and Mills' 4th Battalion was to advance from the Mellahah posts; but the artillery work was feeble and useless, and, although Mills carried out his orders and moved forward about a mile and a half, the enemy crossing at Red Hill was not molested.

As a preliminary to Grant's advance, the 1st Australian Light Horse Regiment under Granville had ridden forward before dawn to seize the Umm esh Shert crossing. While one squadron, under Major O. B. Ryrie,¹ moved directly on the position, another squadron, under Major G. H. L. Harris, advanced on the right to endeavour to cut off the enemy's escape towards Red Hill. The Turks, without offering resistance, retreated across the river; but there they held a good defensive position and were supported by guns. Ryrie's squadron with four machine-guns then occupied Red Hill without opposition, and the balance of the regiment was ordered up the Umm esh Shert track to Es Salt. The position in the afternoon, therefore, was that Red Hill was very weakly held by this one squadron, with superior enemy forces immediately across the river. Between Red Hill and the left flank of Bailey's 11th Regiment (of the 4th Brigade) was a gap of two or three miles. Grant realised that the enemy, if they re-occupied Red Hill, were practically astride his communications with the south. Late in the afternoon, when

¹ Maj. O. B. Ryrie, 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Cooma District, N.S.W.: b. Coolringdon, Cooma, 28 June, 1876. Died, 16 Jan., 1934.

General Chauvel motored up the plain to Grant's headquarters, the brigadier emphasised the danger of the Red Hill position and the exposed condition of his left flank, and pressed for an additional regiment to reinforce the squadron on the hill. Chauvel fully appreciated the danger, but, after communicating with his chief of staff, told Grant that no troops could be spared at that stage for the purpose.

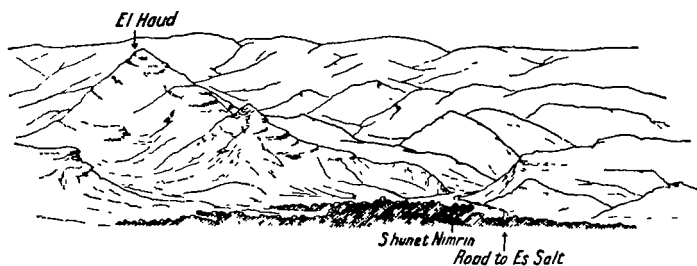
Grant's advanced squadrons reported during the afternoon that the enemy was showing considerable movement across the river, and from brigade headquarters troops and transport could be seen descending the main track towards the crossing at Damieh. Already there were many indications of a strong counter-attack; and at 5 p.m. Chauvel, who had taken the brigade under direct control of Desert Mounted Corps, ordered Grant to withdraw from the Nahr ez Zerka, and to cover the Jisr ed Damieh-Es Salt track until seriously attacked. Chauvel was completely alive to the dangerous position of the brigade, for he instructed Grant that he was not to be "compromised" in an effort to cover the road. Grant therefore pulled his regiments back from the mud-hills near the river, and rested them on the foot-hills, which left the Turks clear to enlarge their bridgehead east of the river. At the same time he shifted his headquarters slightly to the south, and "A" and "B" Batteries of the Honourable Artillery Company were withdrawn to the same position, since, with the menace at Red Hill, it was not deemed safe to leave them forward on the plain. Red Hill was still occupied by the squadron of the 1st Regiment. During the night it was discovered that the Turks had completed the pontoon bridge immediately behind the hill. Grant's line was therefore in momentary danger of a serious blow from troops using this bridge, which was some miles to the south, and, while his horsemen could retire eastwards into the hills, the position of the three batteries was already delicate. In their advanced positions they had been exposed to a sudden enemy advance, but had a good stretch of plain ground for their escape to the south. From their new position, in the folds of the foot-hills, the way to the south was broken by many rocky valleys and steep wadys debouching from the range. During the night they were shut up in pockets close to brigade head-

quarters, and the only way out was for some distance directly towards the enemy.

The day as a whole had gone unfavourably for Chauvel. Es Salt had been brilliantly captured by Wilson's brigade; but the infantry had been decisively checked at Shunet Nimrin, and so far nothing had been seen of the Arabs. To win the Shunet Nimrin position the 60th Division, supported at the outset by the Anzac Mounted Division fighting under Shea's command, had to advance on a line from the hill El Haud on the north of the road, and then southwards through Tel el Musta to Makkar ed Derbasi. The hills to be taken nowhere reached a thousand feet; but they rose sharply from the plain, were packed close together, and, in addition to the trenches made by the enemy, contained numberless fissures and many groups of ancient caves, all giving perfect shelter to their defenders.

By 1.30 a.m. on the 30th the Londoners were within 800 yards of the foot-hills, and still undiscovered. At 2 a.m. the 180th Brigade advanced in the dark on the main position astride the road, while the 179th Brigade assaulted El Haud. At the outset, as we have seen, they overran the enemy's outposts; but they could make no impression upon the main positions beyond. Between the scrub from which they debouched and the foot-hills was a stretch of naked plain, and rising abruptly in front of this were hills occupied by between 4,000 and 5,000 of the enemy. The first surprise rush having failed, the undertaking was hopeless, unless the enemy could be menaced from the rear, or completely cut off from his supplies. The official story of the attack of the 2/19th Londoners on the first morning is, in brief, the story of all the bloody and profitless fighting by this gallant division during the days which followed. "The battalion," wrote Shea, "reached the caves on the western slope of Makkar ed Derbasi with little opposition, but was then held up by the precipitous nature of the country, the only approaches to the summit being two narrow paths swept by machine-gun and rifle fire; and though a small party reached the enemy's trenches by these paths and captured a machine-gun, only one of the party succeeded in getting back, and he was severely wounded." Again and again, during that

day and the days which followed, the Londoners made heroic and costly attempts to shift the enemy; but at no time was his position dangerously challenged. Two weak brigades of troops, which had been marching and fighting without a break for many months, were attempting a task which, if it was to have been swift and decisive, needed the strength of two fresh divisions. Only overwhelming numbers and a strong flanking movement could have won immediate success at Shunet Nimrin. During the first day Shea endeavoured to use the Anzacs on his right and left; but the Australians and New Zealanders were at once held up, and, with the exception of a squadron of the 6th Light Horse Regiment, were nowhere actually engaged.



View of Shunet Nimrin and El Haud.

This squadron of the 6th under Major S. A. Tooth (known as "Tooth's Detachment") was detached from its regiment, placed under orders of the 179th Infantry Brigade, and allotted to cover the left flank of the Londoners' assault. In the subsequent fighting Tooth's little party, which was reinforced by two companies of Patiala infantry, frequently made close touch with the enemy, but, owing to the failure of the general attack astride the Es Salt road, it was never seriously committed.

With the Londoners beaten off, no news from the Arabs, and Grant far from happy at Damieh, Chauvel had little to cheer him on the evening of the first day's fighting. But early in the night came news of Wilson's fine work at Es Salt; and, with the town in his possession and the main road blocked behind Shunet Nimrin, there was still a chance of success.

Wilson's ride on Es Salt was one of the cleanest and most decisive pieces of light horse work in the campaign. After the brigade, with the 9th under Scott leading, had left Grant's position and led their horses up the first two miles of track, the country improved and mounted progress became relatively easy. The climb carried the regiments through a rapid and interesting change in climate and season. The Jordan valley was already dry and parched; the little patches of crops on the foot-hills were turning from green to yellow; still higher up the mountain-side the wheat was just bursting into ear; and by noon on the plateau the light horsemen found the wheat short and young, the vines in tender leaf, and the country studded with wild flowers.

Wilson had about fourteen miles to cover, and over nearly half of that distance the screen of the 9th saw nothing of the enemy. On either side the route was commanded by hills, and small enemy parties might easily have delayed the advance long enough to warn and prepare the numerous troops concentrated about the enemy's Fourth Army base at Es Salt. But soon after dawn the 4th Brigade had cut the telegraph wire from Nablus to Gilead on the Damieh track, and Wilson was close to Es Salt before the enemy suspected his coming. A few miles from the town the brigade scouts under Lieutenant T. N. Rickaby² saw three Turkish horsemen, and a little further on a troop of cavalry. Two Australians crept up within twenty yards of the three Turks before they were discovered, shot one and captured the others. A dash was then made at the troop, but the men escaped, some mounted and some on foot, over the rocky ground. The brigade was now, after a climb of 4,000 feet in ten miles, on the tableland of Jebel Jelaad, and a little further on the enemy was discovered in some sangars on a high ridge about 1,000 yards long, immediately to the left of the track. On either side of this ridge, at distances of from 1,200 to 1,400 yards, were two detached hills also occupied by the enemy, and covering his main central position.

Instant action was necessary if Es Salt was to be occupied before dark. The advance had been handicapped by the very

² Lieut. T. N. Rickaby, M.M. 9th L.H. Regt. Grazier; b. Lake Albert, S. Aust., 1875.

slow climbing-pace of the battery camels, and it was now growing late in the afternoon. About this time Wilson's wireless intercepted a message from Chauvel to Hodgson saying that Es Salt must be taken that night; Wilson, therefore, although he was out of touch with division, decided at once to attack. Rifle and machine-gun fire was opened upon the three positions, but the Turks stood firm. Mounted work was impossible off the track. Wilson then sent a dismounted squadron of the 9th Regiment against the hill on the right, two troops of the same regiment and a squadron of the 10th against the position on the left, and ordered the remaining Western Australians of the 10th and a squadron of the 9th to prepare to assault the sangars on the main ridge in the centre. The readiness with which the light horsemen swung from their saddles and went forward as infantry was noticed with pleasure by their reserved brigadier. Moving smartly and taking advantage of the broken ground, the men of the 9th quickly drove the Turks from the hill on the right, and in a few minutes rifles and machine-guns at effective ranges had a stream of cross-fire playing on the sangars in the centre. At the same time the other party, assisted by overhead rifle and machine-gun fire and one gun of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery, carried the hill on the left. While these two advances were in progress, Wilson placed the remaining men of the 9th and 10th in readiness for a bayonet assault on the centre, and at the same time ordered the 8th under Major Shannon to prepare for a mounted dash at the town, two miles away, as soon as the resistance was broken.

After five minutes' bombardment of the sangars by three of the Hong Kong guns, assisted by twelve machine-guns, the attack was ordered. The situation was ideal for sustained covering fire. The two squadrons of Western Australians, boldly led by Major Timperley, and the men of the 9th had first to descend into a deep gully and then climb the hill on the other side to the Turkish positions; thus gun and machine-gun fire could be maintained until the light horsemen were within a few yards of the sangars. Doubling down the rocky slope, the men dashed at the hill with the bayonet, shouting as they went. So heavy and concentrated was the supporting fire, especially from the machine-guns, that the Turks were

forced down behind their stone shelters, and the Australian casualties during the climb were slight. Many defenders bolted as the light horsemen closed; others, including a few German officers and men, fought to the finish and were killed on their ground. As the Australians gained the summit, and before the hand-to-hand fighting had ceased, Wilson with his pennant gave the signal to release the eager squadrons of the 8th, who were already on their horses. The regiment moved instantly at the trot, and, ignoring fire from a hill held by the enemy a little further on, were soon galloping down on Es Salt. They encountered opposition from some fifty or sixty Turkish riflemen in sangars, but these were quickly flanked and broken, and the rush on the town continued.

The approach to Es Salt was down a number of little valleys between rough, stony hills. The squadrons, taking different routes, were in places obstructed, and the penetration became an affair of isolated galloping thrusts by troop-leaders. The first troop to enter was very dashing led by Lieutenant Charles Foulkes-Taylor,^a a young Western Australian, who had only recently received his commission and was temporarily detached from the 10th Regiment. Taylor, revolver in hand and his men at his heels, raced along the cobbled winding streets, shooting as he went and scattering the startled natives. The few hundred Turks still in the town were in a state of disorganisation. Troops armed with revolvers used them freely and effectively; others, bayonet in hand, took the enemy on the point. Taylor, whose ammunition had given out, dashed at a German staff officer who was trying to organise resistance among the now panic-stricken Turks, compelled him to surrender, seized his revolver, and with a few men charged after a column of transport which was urging teams along the road towards Amman. Here many vehicles were overtaken on the narrow track beside a wady, and the light horsemen forced teams and carts over the edge of the roadway, whence they tumbled and bounced down into the deep bed of the water-course. Two miles out, Taylor's party, now reduced to six, was stopped by organised machine-gun fire.

^a Lieut. C. D. Foulkes-Taylor, M.C. 10th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Cobham, York District, and Malcolm, W. Aust.; b. London, Eng., 14 March, 1890.



LIGHT HORSE AND BRITISH YEOMANKY AT ES SALT.

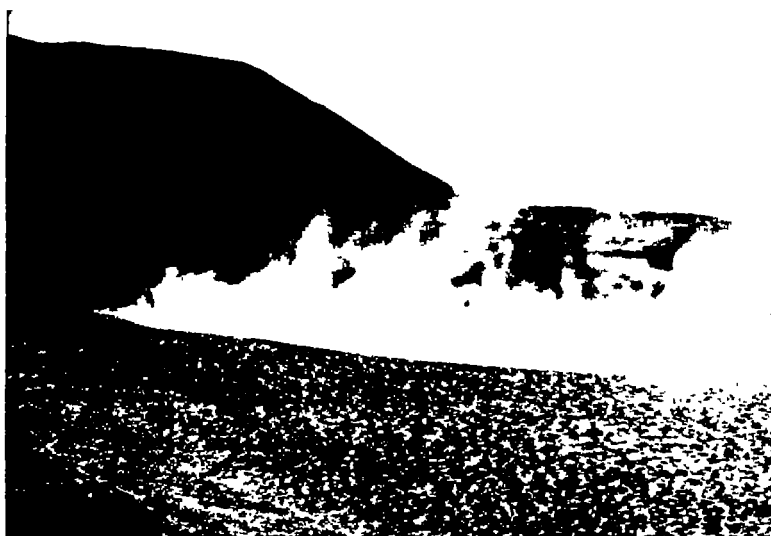
Imperial War Museum Official Photo No B05

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DUST IN THE JORDAN VALLEY.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B230



DUST IN THE JORDAN VALLEY.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B25

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The troop had, however, in a few minutes overriden and captured upwards of 200 armed enemy troops and a great quantity of material. By now the rest of the regiment had gained the town, and a covering line of the 8th and 9th Regiments was at once pushed out to the north and east. By nightfall brigade headquarters had been established on the outskirts of Es Salt. In the subsequent search of the town twenty-eight new machine-guns still packed in their cases were discovered, and the booty also included a great quantity of ammunition and small arms, five motor lorries, and much other transport and war material.

As Wilson was preparing for the attack on the sangars two miles away, he received a message from the General Officer Commanding the 5th Mounted Brigade, stating that the yeomanry, who had advanced by the shorter route from Umm esh Shert, were within a few miles of Es Salt, and proposed to attack on the following morning at dawn. The Australian leader replied that he was already within striking distance and was committed to the assault. When the town had been taken, Wilson was unable for some time to locate the headquarters of Australian Mounted Division, which was also marching by the Shert track, or to pick up Hodgson's wireless; but he succeeded in making touch by wireless with Chauvel. The original plan was that, as soon as Es Salt was captured—when it was expected that both the 3rd Light Horse and the 5th Mounted Brigades would be on the position—the advance should be continued along the Amman road to the junction of the track from Ain es Sir and Shunet Nimrin at Hill 2900, about seven miles from Es Salt. Wilson's position was already precarious; but he decided, when the moon rose at 10 o'clock, to send Major A. C. N. Olden,⁴ of the 10th Regiment, with two squadrons and four machine-guns to the desired position. Olden met with no resistance until within 2,000 yards of his objective; there he was held up by a strong enemy force, and remained in observation.

On the night of the 30th, therefore, Grant was astride the track east of the Jordan at Damieh; Wilson had gained his objectives at Es Salt; the 5th Mounted Brigade was close to

⁴ Lt-Col A. C. N. Olden, D.S.O. Temporarily commanded 10th L.H. Regt., 1917, 1918, 1919. Dental surgeon, of Ballarat, Vic., and Narrogin, W. Aust., b. 3 July, 1881.

Es Salt, and Rylie's 2nd Brigade, followed by Cox with the 1st, was pushing up the track from Umm esh Shert. The infantry had failed in the attack at Shunet Nimrin; but, if the Arabs fulfilled their promises and seized the rough alternative route from Shunet Nimrin to Ain es Sir, joining up with Olden's men about Hill 2900, the Turks in the foot-hills would be completely isolated. The fate of Chauvel's enterprise depended on Grant's position at Damieh and on the work of the Arabs.

The Arabs may be dismissed at once. With their customary caution and fear of the Turks, the Beni Sakr tribe—which was not yet supported by the Hejaz men operating under Emir Feisal around Maan—withheld co-operation until the British should clearly demonstrate that they were about to achieve a decisive success. Instead of closing the track to Ain es Sir at once and pressing on towards Naaur as arranged, they stood off until the Turks should be routed at Shunet Nimrin and the mounted brigades had captured Es Salt. When on the morning of the 30th the first attack of the infantry failed, they remembered the fate of the first raid to Amman, folded up the tents of their great camp at Madeba, and dispersed to their districts. This left the Ain es Sir track open to the Turks at Shunet Nimrin. Before the operations began, they had improved the route until it was fit for wheeled traffic; now, pushing on with the work, they were able during the rest of the fighting to draw supplies and munitions from Amman and Ain es Sir, and so were independent of the main road which had been cut by Wilson.

But the absence of Arab assistance on the first day, even coupled with the non-success of the infantry, was, although disappointing to Chauvel, of small concern compared to the disaster which befell Grant's brigade early on the morning of May 1st. Grant had feared an attack during the night, but the front remained quiet, and dawn disclosed no enemy movement. Chauvel, on learning of the pontoon bridge at Red Hill, decided to attempt to seize it in the early morning. The Camels were to advance up the west side of the river, while the light horse squadron on the hill was to move towards the bridge from the east. Grant was asked to co-operate, and one squadron of the 11th Regiment under Major Costello was

sent to assist the squadron of the 1st. From Grant's headquarters at about 6 a.m. considerable Turkish movement could be seen on the western road which led down to the Damieh bridge, but the battery commanders reported the targets beyond their range. A little earlier, patrols of the 4th Regiment towards Nahr ez Zerka in the north had been held up by considerable bodies of enemy horsemen. "B" Battery was moved a short distance to the south to cover the left flank of the line, but was still located on rough ground about the foot-hills.

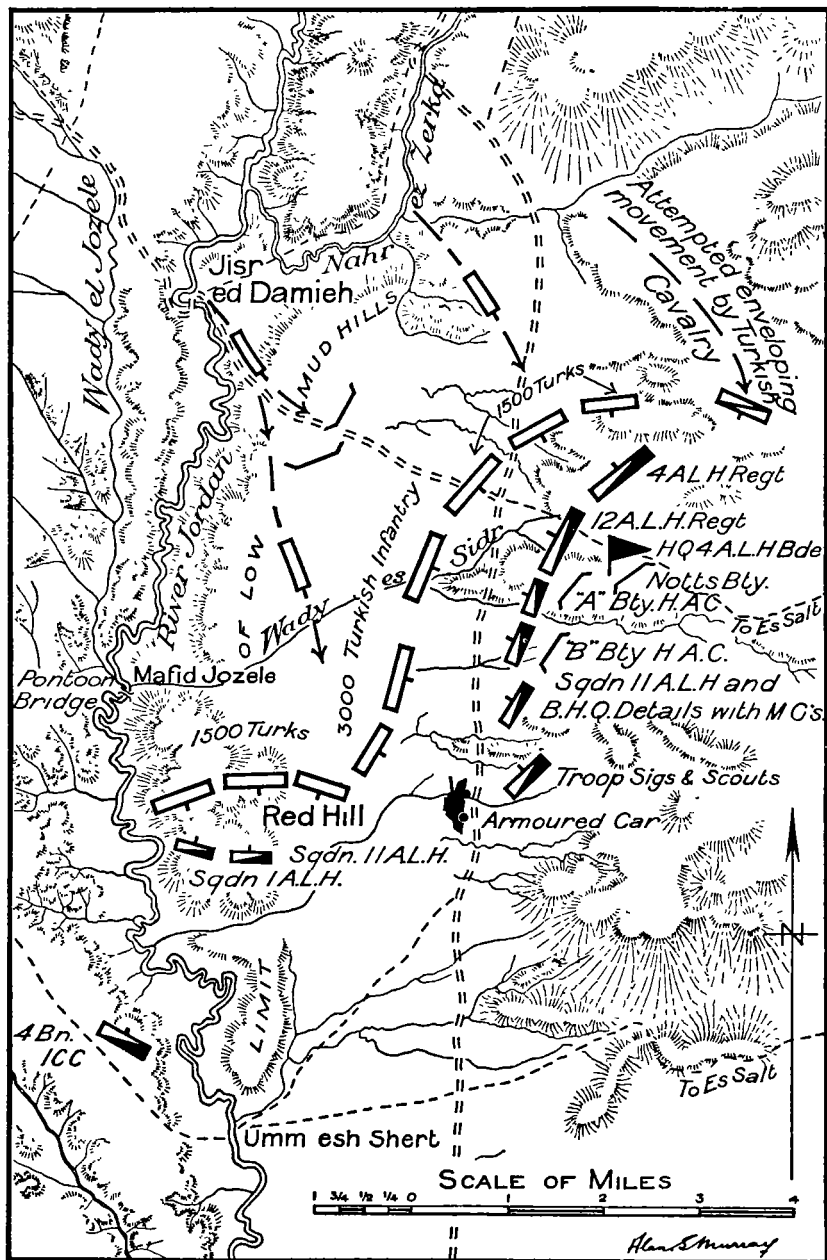
The situation was uncomfortable. Grant had only about 800 rifles available for the firing line. Both Cameron and Bouchier were of opinion that the enemy had strongly reinforced his bridgehead during the night, and that, if the light horse regiments were boldly attacked, their long thin line could offer no effective resistance. About 7 a.m. these two officers, accompanied by Grant, climbed the hills behind brigade headquarters on a personal reconnaissance of the whole position. With the contested ground showing in detail below them, Grant decided that, for the safety of his brigade and the holding of the track, his line must be shifted a few miles to the south, its left pivoting on Red Hill and its right covering the track as it led up through the foot-hills. At that time the 4th Regiment was on the right, the 12th in the centre, and one troop of the 11th on the extreme left, with two squadrons of the 11th (less one troop) in reserve.

As Grant, Cameron, and Bouchier walked down from the hills, rifle and machine-gun fire burst suddenly from the whole front, and in a few minutes it was clear that the Turks were attacking in great strength. Their plan was admirably laid. They had during the night passed about 4,000 infantry over the Damieh bridge, and formed them up ready for the assault in the mud-hills on a front of 2,000 yards astride the Es Salt track. At the same time they had concentrated about 1,000 infantry and 500 cavalry along the Nahr ez Zerka, and had gathered a further force to cross the river over the pontoon bridge and attack Red Hill.

The forces east of the river fell simultaneously on the 4th and 12th Regiments. Wave after wave of infantry in open order, and very boldly led, debouched from the mud-hills and

struck straight across the plain. At the same time the infantry from the Zerka smashed down upon the open right flank of the light horse line, while the cavalry, making a *détour* into the hills, endeavoured to cut in behind the Australians. The plain offered very little cover, and Grant's men in the foot-hills found the Turks an easy target; heavy and accurate shooting cut down the leading wave, and temporarily checked the advance. A squadron of the 11th was sent to cover "B" Battery on the left, and the three batteries, at once opening a rapid fire, began also to inflict heavy casualties. But the Turks had clearly sensed Grant's weak spot, and by 8 o'clock a force echeloning to the south struck strongly for the open ground between the Australian left and Red Hill. About the same time enemy guns, emerging by the track from the mud-hills, boldly took up positions in the open and began a heavy fire on the British batteries and brigade headquarters. Bailey, with the 11th Regiment, was soon warmly engaged in an endeavour to hold up the enemy's right, and two troops of the 12th, together with the brigade's scouts and signallers, grooms and batmen, were sent to his assistance. Already the position was critical. About this time a strong Turkish force crossed the pontoon-bridge to attack Red Hill, and engaged the two weak squadrons of the 1st and 11th Regiments. Two armoured cars attached to Grant's brigade came into action in the gap on the left; one was almost immediately knocked out by a direct hit from a shell, but the other with its machine-guns contributed solidly to the work of the light horsemen until it ran out of ammunition.

To the north the 4th Regiment was being forced further into the hills, and by 8.30 o'clock the enemy, advancing down the plain, were close to the Es Salt track. The "A" and Notts Batteries were removed to positions south of "B" Battery, where they again came into action and, assisted by heavy machine-gun fire, all at short range, so mauled the enemy that the advance was checked for about an hour. But during the pause the Turks were building up their lines for a renewed assault. At 10 o'clock the two light horse squadrons on Red Hill were overwhelmed by a large enemy force and swept from that position out on the plain east and south-east. There, however, they were able for a time not only to check



TURKISH ATTACK ON 4TH A.L.H. BRIGADE—POSITION ABOUT 8 A.M., 1ST MAY, 1918.

the Turks on Red Hill, but also with their machine-guns to enfilade the column which was marching down between the hill and the left flank of Grant's extended line. Further north, about 10.30 a.m., the Turks renewed their attacks with great vigour. The light horse right was forced south of the Es Salt track, and the enemy infantry from the north began to follow its cavalry into the foot-hills in an endeavour to get behind the Australian brigade. Disorder was now showing in Grant's command. Communication with the south had been cut by shell-fire, and the enemy, with rifles and machine-guns, was so close that contact between units was difficult.

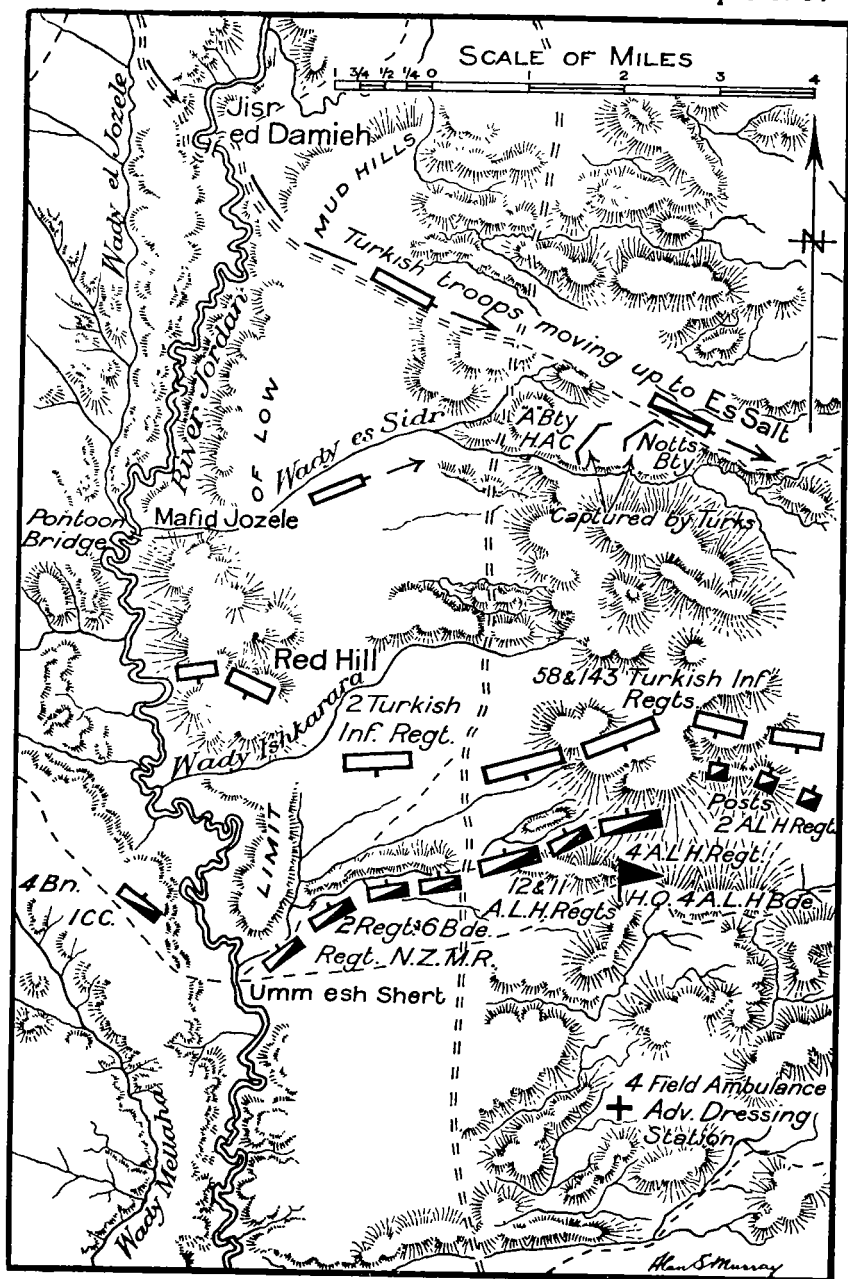
The position of the guns had become serious. The enemy riflemen were within 700 yards of Grant's left flank on the plain and within 1,000 yards of his line along the foot-hills. To escape the wadys and reach level ground, the batteries must travel towards the river before swinging south, and this meant facing the Turkish fire and certain destruction. Grant first ordered "B" Battery to withdraw; and after a great strain on the teams, and much man-handling, the guns, with the exception of one which was overturned and had to be abandoned, reached a position of safety. The other two batteries continued fiercely to fling out their shrapnel at rapidly shortening range, but the Turks were widely scattered over a considerable depth, and their losses were not destructive. About 11.30 a.m. the brigade and regimental limbers were ordered to retire, but the teams were speedily shot down, and the vehicles had to be abandoned. It was clear now that "A" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company, and the Notts Battery, were doomed to capture. Despite sustained punishment from all arms, the enemy pressed in to within 200 yards of the guns and the light horse firing line; Grant therefore ordered the destruction and abandonment of the guns, and the retirement of all troops into the hills. The gunners removed the breech-blocks and sights, and did such demolition as was possible in a few minutes; and the force withdrew slowly, firing as it went, up the slopes of the range to a position to which the horses had already been taken. Part of the ambulance had also to be abandoned after many of the horses had been destroyed in the efforts made to remove the vehicles.

Grant might, by concentrating on the hills above the guns, have kept the Turks away from them for some hours. But

when he ordered their sacrifice he was faced by a disaster incomparably greater than the loss of two batteries. As the fight developed, it became clear that the enemy's chief purpose was not the capture of the guns or the destruction of the light horse brigade. In his strong thrust between Grant's left and Red Hill, he was rapidly approaching the track leading from Umm esh Shert to Es Salt, which was the one means of escape left open to the four mounted brigades upon Gilead. With the loss of the Umm esh Shert track those four brigades would have been completely isolated; to regain the west bank of the Jordan they must have cut their way out from Es Salt by the east, and passed south down the tableland, in the hope of ultimately finding a passage towards the northern end of the Dead Sea. Recognising the extreme gravity of the situation, Grant ordered the 4th and 12th Regiments on their withdrawal into the hills to proceed south with all possible speed and debouch on to the plain north of the Shert route. The high intelligence of the light horsemen in a crisis always contributed largely to success. Disorganised though they were the squadrons in the hills appreciated to the full the menace which the enemy's work had so swiftly created, and bent with all their native capacity to the difficult movement. In a few minutes many little columns of led horses in single file were picking their way along the side of the steep ranges. All the ridges and gorges ran east and west; the route of the horsemen led south. Bouchier and Cameron knew that, with their resistance withdrawn, Bailey with his miscellaneous supports was being desperately pressed on the plain, and was being steadily driven back. It was a grim race between Turks marching on the level plain and the men leading their horses on the heights. Twice Bailey was forced from his ground; but each time, with the assistance of the horses, he succeeded in breaking clear of the confident enemy thousands, and in taking up a fresh position. In these movements he was supported by part of the 12th Regiment in the lower hills. As he was driven to a position in the foot-hills almost due east of Red Hill, with his left extended towards the river, the men retiring along the side of the range began to emerge to his assistance. A strong firing line, rapidly built up, checked the advance and saved the day.

The break in the telephone wires early in the fight led to delay in communications between Grant and Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters; but as soon as Chauvel received news of the heavy attack at Damieh he realised its seriousness and acted promptly. Chaytor had so far taken no part in the operations, his brigades having been placed under the commands of Shea and Hodgson. In the morning he had his headquarters about two miles south of the Auja crossing of the Jordan, and Chauvel ordered him to take over the defence of the valley from the north, though he had available only one regiment of the New Zealanders and two regiments of yeomanry of the 6th Mounted Brigade, together with a battery of armoured cars and the No. 1 Australian Light Car Patrol. Riding at once up the plain, he quickly learned that the position was critical and that nine guns and much baggage had been lost. Pushing the cars with their machine-guns into the fight on the left, he joined Grant on the position east of Red Hill. The light horsemen then had the situation at least temporarily in hand; but Chaytor decided to withdraw the brigade further south, and, selecting a superior position about a mile north of the Umm esh Shert track, he ordered it to be held at all costs. It was a naturally strong site in the foot-hills, and the Australian left had good cover in broken ground out on the plain. At the same time the New Zealanders and the yeomanry were moved up the valley to complete the line to the river, while the 2nd Regiment of Cox's brigade, which was in position on the plateau between the foot-hills and Es Salt, supported Grant's right by establishing a series of posts down the slopes of the range.

The Turks followed Grant's brigade on its withdrawal, but did not at once renew the attack, and during the night Chaytor's front was improved by strenuous digging and the building of sangars. Grant's casualties at Damieh had in the circumstances been very light. Including the gunners of the three Royal Horse batteries, they were: 1 officer and 1 other rank killed, 7 officers and 44 other ranks wounded, and 48 (chiefly made up of wounded and of ambulance men who remained with them) missing. All the guns of the Notts Battery and "A" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company, and one of "B" Battery were lost—a total of nine; in



TURKISH ATTACK ON 4TH A.L.H. BRIGADE—GRANT'S POSITION AT DUSK ON 1ST MAY, 1918.

addition, the Turks captured 2 waggons, 16 limbers, 4 ambulances, and a number of water-carts and motor-cycles. These were the only guns lost to the enemy during the long campaign in Palestine, and—except for those deliberately abandoned to the enemy in the Evacuation of Anzac—were the only guns covered by Australian troops to be lost in the whole war. It is not necessary to linger upon the depression in the brigade which followed the disaster. Happily all the officers and men of the batteries escaped capture; they were at once supplied with new guns, and were in action again in less than two days.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ES SALT RAID—*continued*

MEANWHILE the infantry had, early in the morning of May 1st, renewed the assault on the Turkish stronghold at Shunet Nimrin. After a preliminary bombardment of seventy-five minutes, the Londoners again made heroic attempts to climb the heights, but were everywhere cut down and repulsed, mainly by machine-gun fire. In view of the situation at Damieh, orders for a renewed attack later in the day were cancelled; Shea's force was weakened by the withdrawal of a mounted regiment on the left and by the loss of the Leicester Battery—both sent to join Chaytor's command. Nor was it only at Shunet Nimrin that the overthrow of the 4th Light Horse Brigade at Damieh was to have immediate and crippling consequences. While large Turkish forces pressed down the valley towards the Shert track, another body marched up the path towards Es Salt, and by nightfall the situation there was becoming serious.

Shortly before dawn on May 1st the 5th Mounted Brigade, under General Kelly, advanced to attack Es Salt; for both the brigade commander and the headquarters of Australian Mounted Division were still ignorant that it had been captured nearly twelve hours before by Wilson's light horsemen. When the yeomanry screen came upon the Australians there was a spirited exchange of good-humoured chaffing. Ryrie with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade reached the town soon afterwards, and was ordered at once to press on to the capture of Hill 2900 in co-operation with the two squadrons of the 10th under Olden. At the same time Hodgson pushed the yeomanry down the main road to Shunet Nimrin, to make a vigorous attack upon the rear of the force which was holding up the Londoners; Cox, with the 1st Brigade, was ordered to take up a line along the Umm esh Shert-Es Salt track, to cut off the escape of the Shunet Nimrin Turks towards the north. Hill 2900 was found to be evacuated, so that Ryrie was favourably placed for closing the road leading from Shunet Nimrin through Ain es Sir to the Amman road. At midday Hodgson was still without information of the break-through

at Damieh, and believed the trap set for the enemy to be complete.

Early in the afternoon Wilson, who, having been asked to support Ryrie towards Hill 2900, had sent out the 8th Regiment and four machine-guns, had only two troops of the 10th Regiment (about forty men) in reserve. At that time Es Salt was unguarded from the west. Then came the news of the disaster at Damieh, and the information that the enemy was advancing in strength by the track leading up to the town on Gilead. On the instant all Hodgson's plans collapsed. The two troops of Western Australians in reserve were rushed out along the Damieh track. Ryrie and the troops supporting him were ordered to abandon Hill 2900 at once, and withdraw upon Es Salt—which was done, two squadrons of the 3rd Brigade being left on the Amman road about four miles out. Ryrie was then ordered to take part in the rear attack upon Shunet Nimrin, co-operating with the yeomanry who, advancing down the road—a steep, narrow, and intricate highway cut round the sides of precipitous hills above the wild gorge of the Wady Shaib—had been held up before they got half-way at a bridge at El Howeij. After a conference between Ryrie and Kelly, it was decided that the yeomanry should endeavour to seize the commanding high ground on the east and cover the advance of Ryrie's regiments down the road. Hodgson's order was "the road must be opened to-day." Cox, with the 1st Brigade, was to co-operate on the right of the 2nd by a vigorous thrust towards el Haud. But in consequence of the disaster at Damieh, Cox's main strength was now needed to ensure that the Shert track in the hills was not molested, and he could display only slight activity towards Shunet Nimrin. Nowhere, however, could progress be made in the face of the enemy's fire and the extremely rough country, and by nightfall the attack had not developed. At about 8 p.m., Bourne, who was in the hills on the right of the 4th Brigade, sent Lieutenant W. K. King¹ with twenty men to raid some troublesome enemy posts on his front. King's party killed five Turks, and captured a few prisoners and a machine-gun.

¹ Lieut. W. K. King, M.C. 2nd L.H. Regt. Gazier; of Hughenden, Q'land; b. Longreach, Q'land, 6 Apr., 1896. Killed in action, 14 July, 1918.

During the night two squadrons of the 10th Light Horse Regiment took up a position guarding Es Salt from attack by the road from Damieh; Scott with the 9th carried the line round the north of the town, where he occupied the height Kefr Hudr; the 8th Regiment and one squadron of the 10th were astride the Amman road to the east. The position was now decidedly a defensive one. The Turks, with their strong force at Shunet Nimrin unshaken, and served by the track to Ain es Sir—pressing hardly also against Es Salt and against Chaytor down on the plain—were admirably placed for the offensive. They had to win very little ground, and that lightly held, in order to isolate the four mounted brigades in the hills. But Chauvel had not yet lost hope. On the night of the 1st he ordered Shea to renew the assault at Shunet Nimrin, and Hodgson was directed to push with every available man down the main road from Es Salt.

The Londoners resumed their heartbreaking task at 2 a.m. on the 2nd. In the first rush they occupied the enemy's advanced sangars, but were then again beaten off. The fight raged bitterly for some hours, but, although slight gains were made—notably by the Patialas of Tooth's Detachment on the left flank—the assault at no time gave promise of success. Early in the afternoon the 180th Brigade of the 60th was ordered down from Bethany in motor-lorries to join in the attack. Meanwhile the yeomanry and Ryrie's men had made little or no progress in their advance along the Es Salt road. The track was firmly held against them, and the hills on either side were so rugged and precipitous that out-flanking was almost impossible even for dismounted horsemen. Moreover, the left flank of the brigades was open to the enemy towards the east. At 10.30 a.m. the 5th Mounted Brigade was fighting on a narrow front for the Howej bridge, but Ryrie's regiments were not yet in action.

The whole position of the mounted brigades was now complicated, and becoming each hour more dangerous. While the 2nd Brigade and the yeomanry were moving on Shunet Nimrin, enemy forces from both Amman and Damieh were closing on their rear around Es Salt. During the night Wilson's long and lightly-held line round the town had been closely pressed. Todd, with part of the 10th Regiment on a

ridge about two miles from the town, covering the track from Damieh, was hotly attacked in the dark. An advanced post held by one troop, about a mile west of the ridge, was almost surrounded by a strong enemy party and had to be withdrawn; Wilson sent a squadron of the 8th under Major Crawford, with two machine-guns, to reinforce Todd's line. The menace from Amman then developed, and Hodgson was obliged to withdraw the 7th Light Horse Regiment from the advance towards Shunet Nimrin, and place it on a line covering Es Salt-El Awab south-east of the town. Across the Amman road two squadrons of the 8th Regiment were in position with four machine-guns and two guns of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery, while a squadron of the 10th Regiment with four machine-guns under Major H. B. Hamlin² carried the line round towards Scott on the north.

During the afternoon Turks were seen gathering in front of Todd's position. Keeping the light horsemen under harassing gun-fire, the enemy infantry crept up the rocky slope until in places they were within a hundred yards of part of the line. Anticipating an assault, the light horsemen worked hard to improve their little stone sangars, and pack-horses were employed to carry out loads of stick-bombs, which had been found in the enemy dump at Es Salt. At about 8 p.m., when the darkness was intensified by a heavy mist, the Turks attempted to rush the position. Their charge carried them to within twenty yards of the Australian line on the right and within 200 yards on the left; then they were stopped by Hotchkiss and rifle fire. Invisible as the enemy was, the Australians had a good sense of the ground, and the Turks were shot down in large numbers. After a brief pause the attempt was repeated, but again the riflemen on the crest beat them off. At 2 a.m. on the 3rd a further determined endeavour was made to shift the Australians. This time the Turks came within easy bombing distance, but could not live against the cool sure work of the defenders. For two hours, however, they hung on to their ground, and at 4 o'clock made their last rush. Dawn was now close, and the Western Australians and Victorians, fighting with complete confidence, although all night

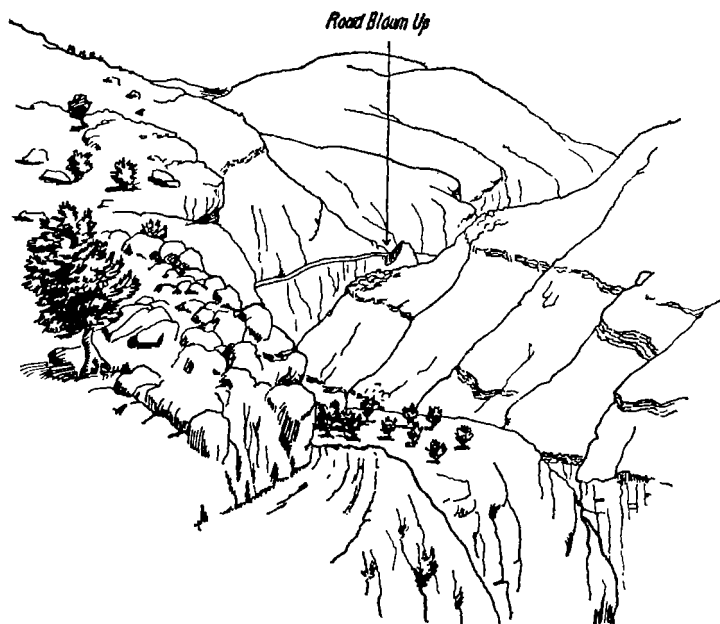
² Maj. H. B. Hamlin, D.S.O. 10th L.H. Regt Surveyor; of Narrogin, W. Aust.; b. Panmure, Auckland, N.Z.; 14 Sept., 1885. Died of illness, 30 May, 1919.

they had been many times outnumbered, cut down the assault before it developed, and then, leaping from their cover, swept the enemy from the ridge with bombs and bayonet. The Turks retired about 1,000 yards, and did not again approach the position. Daylight showed 150 enemy dead close to the sangars; the enemy's casualties probably exceeded 1,000, while the light horse losses were nominal.

About noon on the 2nd Ryrie and Kelly advised Hodgson that the country between them and Shunet Nimrin "was so difficult that they could not hope to reach their objectives much before dark"; they recommended that the attack should be stopped. Hodgson ordered them to continue. A few minutes later Ryrie and Kelly repeated their recommendation, and pointed out that their left flank was in danger from an enemy attack from the east. Hodgson again ordered them forward, but soon afterwards, learning that the enemy was showing up strongly along the Amman road, proposed to Chauvel that the two brigades should be withdrawn for the defence of Es Salt. But this meant the abandonment of the whole operation, and, dark as the outlook was, Chauvel was not yet disposed to accept a total failure. He therefore advised Hodgson that the two brigades should push on for Shunet Nimrin. But the facts could not be evaded, and a little later Chauvel agreed to the withdrawal of the 5th Regiment from Ryrie's brigade to meet the threat from the direction of Amman. This, in effect, reduced the four brigades upon Gilead to the defensive, as Kelly's brigade and the 6th Light Horse Regiment had no chance of success down the road to Shunet Nimrin. Kelly's position, in fact, soon became serious. His attack on the El Howeij bridge had produced no effect upon the enemy; his regiments had suffered many casualties; and the Turks soon afterwards menaced his rear by a strong cavalry advance down the Wady Saidun from the north-east. Hodgson could give him no support, and could only tell him not to retire before dark.

At nightfall Cox's brigade (less the 1st Regiment, which had been ordered up to Es Salt) extended from Grant's right in the foot-hills, near the Umm esh Shert track, to the left of the 10th Regiment astride the track from Damieh; the 9th Regiment was facing north-west and north about Kefr

Hudr, and the line was carried round east of Es Salt by the 8th Regiment and a squadron of the 10th to the regiments of Ryrie's brigade. Ryrie's regiments were being pressed heavily by about 400 infantry and 200 cavalry, supported by four guns. It was now three days since the force had crossed the Jordan, and no supplies had reached the brigades. The track up from Umm esh Shert, although difficult, was not so formidable as the route followed in the rain by the Camel Brigade to Amman a month earlier. But, in consequence of



Es Salt-Shunet Nimrin road (showing where, in the subsequent fighting in September, 1918, it was blown up by the retreating Turks).

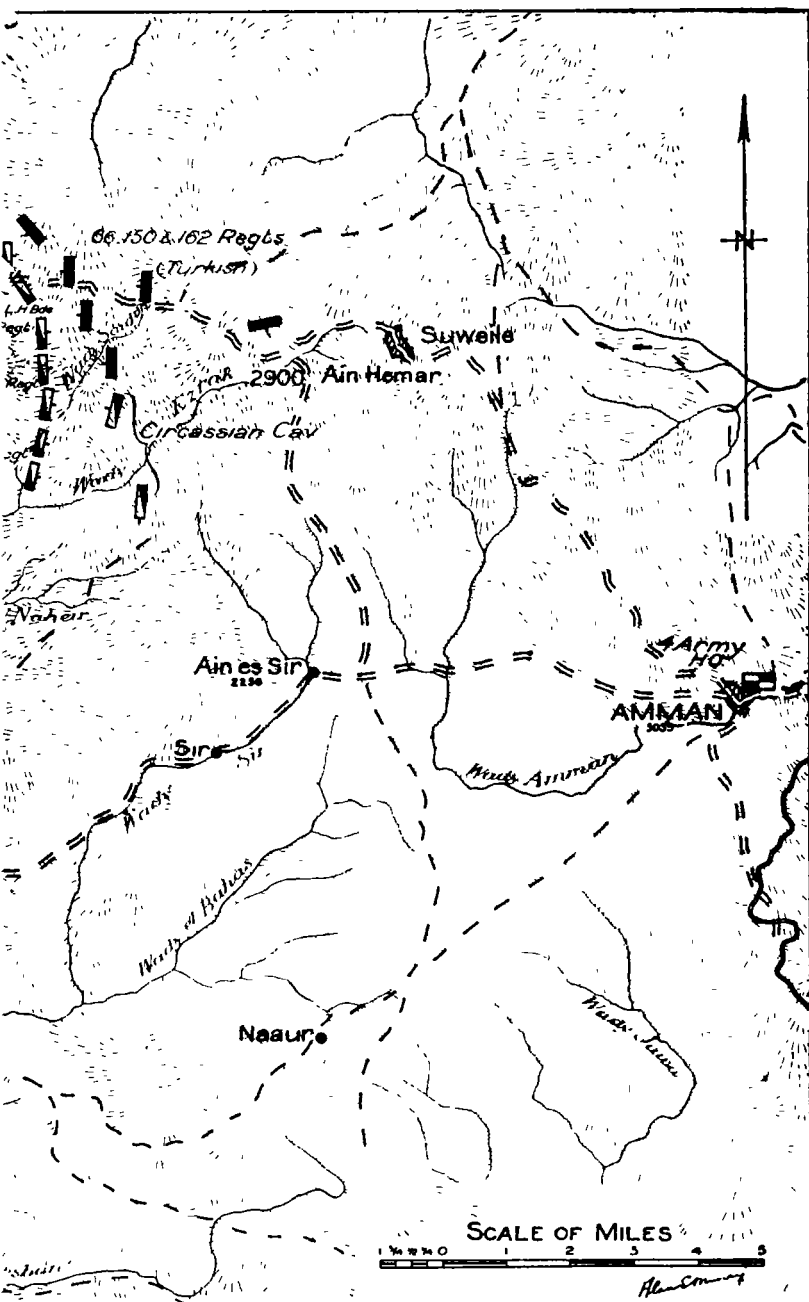
a blunder, it had been reported impossible for camels, and despite the urgency of the situation transport was not attempted. On the 2nd, therefore, orders were issued to the brigades to live on the country, and to the dismay of the natives their cattle and stores were taken in exchange for written orders on the British Government. Happily fat cattle were plentiful, and Es Salt contained considerable supplies of



This is a hand-drawn military map of the Jordanian front during the Arab Revolt. The map shows the following details:

- Rivers and Waterways:** Wadi el Jordani, Wadi Isr, Wadi Ist. Hawara, Wadi Abu Muharik, Wadi Abu Turra, Wadi el Mausha, Wadi el Auja, Wadi Mandesi, Wadi Numran, Wadi el Kefir, Wadi el Zuhair, Wadi er Rume, and Wadi Fikrad.
- Locations and Towns:** Jisr ed Damieh, Mafid Jozele, Umm esh Short, Choraniye, Makhadet Hajla, El Haud, Shunet Nimer, Es Salt, and Bridge Hawari.
- Military Units and Formations:**
 - 703 (German) Regt
 - 8 & 43 Regts (Turkish)
 - H.S. Regt
 - Two Regts NZMR Bde
 - C.C. Bde
 - 60 Inf Div
 - D.M.C. HQ
 - HQ 60 DIV
 - 1 Regt NZMA
 - 3 Cavalry Div
 - SALH Regt
 - H.Q. LALH Bde
 - 1A.L.H. Regt
 - El Haud
 - HQ 48 DM I
 - HQ B Corps
 - Comp Div
 - 10 Regt
 - 9 Regt
 - HQ 38 Bde
 - HQ Aust. Mtg Div
 - ES SALT
 - 2 Sqdns 6 Bde
 - 5 Mtg Bde
 - S&I 2 Cav Regts
 - Shalb
 - Enom
 - Blys
 - Petro's Bde
 - Wadi el Kefir
 - Wadi Fikrad
 - Wadi
- Other Features:** Bridges at el Auja and Hawari, and various dashed lines indicating boundaries or routes.

ES SALT RAID—POSITION JUST :



TO WITHDRAWAL, 2ND MAY, 1918.

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the name of the office to which the person has been appointed.

2.

3.

4. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the name of the office to which the person has been appointed.

5. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the name of the office to which the person has been appointed.

6. The fourth part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the name of the office to which the person has been appointed.

7. The fifth part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the name of the office to which the person has been appointed.

grain, coarse flour, and raisins, so that all ranks were fed, while the horses found good grazing on the growing crops.

On the Amman side the night of the 2nd passed quietly; but at dawn an enemy force some hundreds strong endeavoured to storm a ridge, the right of which was held by the 5th Light Horse Regiment, and the left by two squadrons of the 8th under Major Shannon, with the squadron of the 10th in support. These Turks had crept forward on the previous day until they reached some dead ground within about 800 yards of the Australian line. Their rush at dawn fell chiefly on Shannon's sector. They pressed in strongly against Major Walker's squadron of the 8th on the left, but on the right a spirited counter-attack, led by Major P. H. Priestley,³ forced them to take cover in a little depression, where they could not be reached by the Australian fire. In this fighting Priestley was killed. The Turks were now confined in a small salient, and enfilade fire, in which the 5th Regiment on the right strongly co-operated, cut off their escape. Walker then sent a troop by a *détour* towards their rear; when it was in position, he led his squadron in a frontal counter-attack, and at the same time a squadron of the 5th advanced from the right. The Turks, discovering that they were isolated, surrendered without fighting. Three hundred and nineteen prisoners, including a battalion commander and some Germans, were taken, and about 100 dead were counted on the ground. As usual, the light horse success was gained at very little expense; in the 8th Regiment Priestley and four men of other ranks were killed and nineteen other ranks wounded. During the morning Turkish reinforcements, including guns, could be seen advancing from Amman; but the failure in the early morning had steadied the enemy, and he made no further attack from the east during the day.

The next blow at the defensive ring of the light horsemen fell on the 9th Regiment at Kefr Hudr. Scott had two weak troops in posts on a ridge near the knoll; and soon after 9 a.m. on the 3rd one of these (Lieutenant Masson in command,

³ Maj. P. H. Priestley, 8th L.H. Regt. Dentist and farmer; of Blackwood, S. Aust; b Adelaide, S. Aust., 23 Dec., 1871. Killed in action, 3 May, 1918.

with Sergeant E. C. Smith,⁴ Lance-Corporal J. R. Morrison,⁵ and twelve men, with one Hotchkiss gun) was attacked by a strong party of enemy bombers. The little party fought doggedly until more than half the men had become casualties and the Hotchkiss gun had been blown to pieces by a hand-grenade. Bearing the wounded—except Sergeant Smith, who was too severely hit to be carried—the Australians then slowly retreated, while Morrison and one or two men held off the enemy. The loss of the position compelled a re-adjustment of the line which gave Kefr Hudr to the Turks, and all day they harassed Scott's line with heavy machine-gun fire from their high ground. The regiment was reinforced by a squadron of yeomanry, and arrangements were made for a counter-attack, but when the enemy obtained strong reinforcements this intention was abandoned. A force of about 3,000 Turks was seen advancing east over the hills from the direction of Damieh, and apparently assembling about a mile west of Kefr Hudr. A determined attempt to break through the light horse cordon by an assault on all sides seemed imminent. Hodgson had now used up all his reserves, and half the horse-holders were in the firing line, which left only one man in charge of every eight horses.

In the morning the Londoners, reinforced by their third brigade, had renewed their attack at Shunet Nimrin, but had again been beaten off; the yeomanry had been compelled to give up its effort to force the Howeij Bridge; and Chaytor's regiments, covering the Umm esh Shert track on the foot-hills and across the valley, were being persistently pressed by increasing numbers. It was plain to Chauvel that not only had the enterprise failed, but the offensive had definitely passed to the Turks, and unless the brigades on Gilead were speedily withdrawn the operation might end in disaster. The only supplies to arrive had been carried upon the previous day by a large donkey convoy, and everywhere ammunition was running low. Soon after 4 p.m. on May 3rd, Chauvel, with Allenby's concurrence, gave orders for a general withdrawal.

⁴ Sgt. E. C. Smith (No. 2347; 9th L.H. Regt.). Bootmaker; of Rushworth, Vic.; b. Rushworth, 1892. Died, 28 Aug., 1933.

⁵ L/Cpl. J. R. Morrison (No. 3241; 9th L.H. Regt.). Grazier; of Teesdale, Vic.; b. Toorak, Melbourne, Vic., 1 Sept., 1893. (His brother, No. 3510 Pte. J. G. Morrison, was also with this party.)

At that time Allenby was at Chauvel's advanced-headquarters, about a mile west of Ghoraniye on the road to Jericho, keenly following the progress of the fight as it was revealed by wireless messages. Until the last moment he had refused to discuss failure; but then, recognising the danger of further persistence, he abruptly agreed to the withdrawal with the remark, "I can't lose half my mounted troops."

The Turkish attack upon Grant's brigade had been marked by sound staff work, and was carried out with great dash by all arms. The blow through the gap between the left flank and Red Hill had shown a shrewd grasp of the weakness of Hodgson's position upon Gilead. Had the Umm esh Shert track been won by the enemy, Chauvel's whole scheme must have at once collapsed. But the enemy High Command, having opened so brilliantly on the morning of the 1st, blundered immediately afterwards by dividing his Jordan valley force. Had he struck south with his full strength, instead of sending a large body up the range towards Es Salt, Grant must have been swept over the Umm esh Shert track, and Hodgson's brigades isolated. Even as it was, the troops under Chaytor's command had at times to fight desperately to hold their ground.

The enemy's main attacks fell upon Grant's regiments on the foot-hills. In advance of the Australian line was a prominent isolated hill, known during the fighting as "Table Top." This was exposed to enemy machine-gun fire, and was only lightly held by one troop of the 4th Regiment under Lieutenant W. J. Birkett-Vipont⁶ and two troops of the 11th under Lieutenants L. A. Gordon⁷ and P. McCowan.⁸ On the afternoon of the 2nd the enemy heavily assaulted the position under effective covering fire. Twice the stormers reached within bombing distance of the Australians; each time the light horsemen advanced and met them with the bayonet in the open, and they were driven off, leaving about 100 dead and wounded on the slope. But the third rush was irresistible; the light horsemen were forced from their posts,

⁶ Lieut W. J. Birkett-Vipont, M.M. 4th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Apollo Bay, Vic.; b. Newport, Melb., Vic., 9 Jan., 1892.

⁷ Capt. L. A. Gordon, 11th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; b. Clare, S. Aust., 1891.

⁸ Lieut P. McCowan, M.C.; 11th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Mackay, Q'land; b. Perth, Scotland, 12 Apr., 1891.

and retreated slowly, bearing their wounded. The Australian machine-guns then came into play, and cut down the Turks in large numbers. One party of fifty was completely wiped out. This little enemy success denied a valuable spring of water to Grant's men, and afterwards the supply ran short and the troops suffered acutely in the intense heat. The whole Australian line was now under incessant machine-gun fire, with periods of heavy shelling; the Turks were also able to shell the lower stretches of the Shert track in the hills. "Black Hill," the dominating feature in the defensive line, was attacked by the enemy at 4 a.m. on the 3rd, under cover of a curtain of machine-gun fire. The Turks, who in this fighting wore steel helmets and advanced with fine daring, approached to within twenty yards of the light horse posts, when they were met by the Australians and swept down the hill with bombs and bayonet. All day the line was under intensive fire, but, except for an abortive attack on a post of the 4th Regiment after nightfall, the enemy was content to remain under cover.

Hodgson's withdrawal passed without complications. The light horsemen were now entering upon their fifth night without sleep, and were in a state of extreme exhaustion from fighting and climbing in the ranges. All round the circle the enemy was close to the Australian posts, confident of success, alert and aggressive. To break clean away was, in the circumstances, a movement which demanded the exercise of perfect discipline and cool and clever work by the individual men. The strain on the slender rear-guards, isolated in dark pockets of the ranges, was severe; but everywhere sufficient pressure was maintained to deceive the enemy and enable the main force to assemble and march unmolested down the mountain-side. As in the previous retreat from Gilead, extreme suffering was inflicted upon the wounded. The failure of transport, which handicapped all services, had brought about a shortage in medical supplies; but this was overcome by the handy airmen, who carried up parcels of chloroform, bandages, and other necessities, and dropped them close to Es Salt. During the afternoon every man who could sit on his horse was mounted and sent down the track. "I feel a bit shaky," said one who had to be helped back into the saddle, "but my old horse will carry me through." Blood

was dripping freely from bandages to his head as he rode off smiling and confident. Severe cases were loaded on the camel cacolets, and made a terrible descent in the darkness over a track which, it will be remembered, had been deemed too rough for camels with supplies. Many of the camels fell, and one bearing two wounded men rolled over many times down a steep hillside. In the search in the darkness only one of the men could be found; the other, who had had one of his arms amputated in the hospital at Es Salt, appeared at an ambulance station in the Jordan valley next morning, riding on a donkey. Only two men, supposed to be dying, were left in the hospital at Es Salt to fall into the hands of the Turks. One died, but the other, Corporal W. H. Simms,^a of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, was found, almost well again, by Chauvel personally many months later in the Turkish hospital at Aleppo.

For the second time the abandonment of Es Salt produced a panic among the Christian inhabitants. These wretched victims of the war had accepted the smashing descent of Wilson's brigade as decisive, and had not concealed their feelings of delight. But as it became clear that the Australians were fighting on the defensive, they were moved once more to alarm and dismay. The clearing of the hospital on the afternoon of the 3rd was accepted as sure evidence of evacuation, and many enemy shells, bursting in the town, excited both Christians and Moslems to a state of frenzy. Already hundreds of families were loaded ready for flight, and by nightfall they were hastening with their beasts of burden down towards the valley. Over much of the journey the track was a hazardous goat-walk, and as it became occupied by the horsemen the lot of the fugitives moved every soldier to pity. Shouting to keep touch between families, and moaning and crying, they picked their painful way among the dark forms of the great horses. Many men, spent though they were, and with tempers on edge from overstrain and disappointment, dismounted and placed women and children in their saddles. "Never mind Allah," exclaimed an irritable light horseman to an old man who was beseeching a ride for his wife; "She's

^a Cpl. W. H. Simms (No. 1379, 5th L.H. Regt.). Station manager; b. Indooroopilly, Q'land, 1891.

fallen off twice, and I'm tired of her. Why didn't you teach her to ride? However, up she goes for the last time."

With the 3rd Light Horse Brigade leading and the 7th Light Horse Regiment as rear-guard, the regiments passed down through the line held by the 2nd and 3rd Regiments; then the 2nd Regiment and the Canterburys covered the retirement through the foot-hills. The enemy discovered the withdrawal too late for effective action. The extreme rear-guard was heavily shelled about Es Salt, and the Turkish infantry pressed forward from the east, but was unable to get to close quarters. Before noon on the 4th all Hodgson's brigades were clear of the hills. This hurried movement, together with faulty co-operation, suddenly left Grant's right flank open, and the Turks moved swiftly to envelop it. Grant pushed out a few of his scouts, but these were at once driven back. As he was entirely without reserves, a little force of grooms and batmen was sent forward. These men were closely engaged by a force of Turks with bombs; but they hung on steadily until the position was made safe by the arrival of a force of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, 1st Light Horse Regiment, and the Dorset Yeomanry. All day Grant's line was hotly punished, but that night the brigade was cleverly withdrawn without mishap. The Londoners at Shunet Nimrin had held the Turks there by a strong and successful demonstration while the rest of the troops were retreating from the hills; on the night of the 4th they, with Tooth's squadron of the 6th Light Horse as rear-guard, were withdrawn into the Ghoraniye bridgehead.

The British losses in the operation, although considerable, were not excessive. In the three brigades of Hodgson's Australian Division and the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, six officers were killed and 32 wounded, and of other ranks 44 were killed, 278 wounded, and 37 reported missing, nearly all of the latter being lost at Damieh. Shea's infantry casualties at Shunet Nimrin were 1,116 of all ranks. Upwards of 1,000 enemy prisoners were captured, of whom 666 were taken by the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade and 300 by the infantry at Shunet Nimrin, while the enemy's casualties in killed and wounded probably exceeded 1,500. But, while the balance of casualties was perhaps in favour of the British,

the operation was from Allenby's standpoint an unqualified failure. It had been distinguished by many stirring isolated achievements, notably Wilson's swoop on Es Salt, but from the morning of the second day, when the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade was overthrown at Damieh, and it became clear that the infantry was safely held at Shunet Nimrin and that the Arabs were neutral, the outlook at all times favoured the Turks. The loss of the nine guns was a heavy blow to British prestige; and the whole operation, coming within a month of the failure at Amman, went far to revive the enemy's morale, which had been low after the drive from Gaza and the loss of Jerusalem. Nevertheless these two attempts on Gilead were destined to play an important, perhaps even a decisive, part in the subsequent campaign. The proved capacity of our mounted troops to raid at will the mountain fastnesses had a deep influence on the disposition of the Turkish forces. In papers captured afterwards at Nazareth it was shown that the enemy's High Command was shaken by the rapid and menacing movements east of Jordan, and was convinced that, when Allenby next engaged upon a general advance, he would strike up the valley and towards the east. A few months later he was enabled to exploit this fear to the full.

The Nazareth papers, and information obtained from a captured staff officer, also disclosed that the Turks fully expected the attack on the morning of April 30th, but did not anticipate that it would extend beyond Shunet Nimrin. From their observation posts on El Haud they had noted the British concentration about Jericho, and had even detected the movement towards the Ghoraniye bridge on the night of the 29th. But they had not given a thought to the audacious fling at their Fourth Army Headquarters under Djemal Pasha at Es Salt, and so took no precautions to block Grant's gallop to Jisr ed Damieh or Wilson's climb up the mountain. Their wireless during the fighting made generous reference to the work of the Australians. "Es Salt has been captured," they frankly announced, "by the reckless and dashing gallantry of the Australian cavalry." A German staff officer, who was in Es Salt, afterwards declared that in the rush upon the town

the men of the 8th Light Horse Regiment had galloped their horses in places where no one else would have ridden at all.

The documents captured at Nazareth also proved clearly that the misunderstandings and actual friction which weakened the enemy command in the days before the smashing of the Gaza-Beersheba line were still operating in Allenby's favour in May. Field-Marshal Liman von Sanders, the defender of Gallipoli, had, at Enver's urgent request, in February taken over the supreme command of the Turkish forces in Palestine in the dark days which followed the loss of Jerusalem, and Djemal Pasha had been given the command of the Fourth Turkish Army. In a telegram, dated May 4th, to Major von Papen, then chief of staff to Djemal's Fourth Army, von Sanders expressed strong dissatisfaction with the conduct of the operations east of Jordan. He condemned alike Djemal's failure to guard against the ride up the Jordan valley and the capture of Es Salt, and the steps afterwards taken for the counter-attacks upon the Australian brigades around the town. Von Sanders was at that time still in ignorance of the British evacuation of Gilead. "The enemy wishes," he said, "to create a strategical bridgehead whence he can advance later against Amman, Deraa, or Beisan; consequently it is necessary to retake Es Salt at all costs. . . . I would suggest that in such a position there should not be so much talk of losses and shortage of water. In severe fighting of this kind losses are inevitable. . . . It is we, as Prussian officers, who are charged with the duty of pushing forward with the greatest energy, satisfying complaints as far as possible, but otherwise insisting with an iron-like resolution on our wishes. . . . I have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that it is necessary to close the important roads at suitable places, or at least to prepare them for closing. But on April 30th at 7.30 a.m. the English were at Jisr ed Damieh with artillery and motors, and shortly before 11 a.m. a few squadrons had arrived opposite Es Salt." He also strongly disagreed with the withdrawal of the Fourth Army Headquarters northwards from Es Salt to a point out of close touch with the troops of the VIII Army Corps at Shunet Nimrin.

The papers further disclosed that the Turks had made elaborate plans for an attack upon Chauvel's forces in the

Jordan valley on May 4th. It was the concentration for this operation which brought so many troops about Damieh and Amman, whose presence had not been reported by the British Intelligence.

Both von Papen and Djemal replied, warmly resenting von Sanders' criticism. Von Papen pointed out that the Army Headquarters left Es Salt "one minute before the English forced their way in," and concluded his protest by asking to be relieved of his staff position and employed as a battalion commander "on a battle-front." Djemal contested von Sanders' complaints point by point; and the whole correspondence reveals that lack of discipline, reciprocal confidence, and good feeling which so often undermines the efficiency of a joint allied command. One sentence in Djemal's despatch is significant. Agreeing with von Sanders for once, "It is not improbable," he said, "that the enemy will shortly make a renewed attempt to capture the east Jordan region."

CHAPTER XXXVII

SUMMER IN THE JORDAN VALLEY

WITH the exception of the rear-guards, all Chauvel's raiding troops had recrossed the Jordan by early morning on the 5th. Preparations were at once made for the occupation of the river flank during the summer months. During the latter part of April steps had been taken to establish a bridgehead east of Jordan at the junction of the Wady Auja. On the withdrawal from Es Salt this was occupied by the Auckland Regiment; a bridge was thrown over the stream, and on the following day Wilson's 3rd Light Horse Brigade moved into the bridgehead, and began to work hard on its defences. The area was like that at Ghoraniye, except that the mud-hills began immediately across the river and occupied the whole of the ground. Brigade Headquarters, with the 9th and 10th Regiments, moved dismounted into the bridgehead, while the 8th, with the horses of the brigade, was encamped on the west bank, and the Victorians watched the country between the Jordan and Wady Mellahah and supplied working parties for the entrenchments.

Natives had warned the British that during the summer the lower reaches of the Jordan valley were uninhabitable. At the approach of the hot months even the nomad Arabs fled to the hills; and every resident of Jericho, except the very poor, evacuated the village as soon as the winter season, with its profit-giving pilgrims and tourists, was over. But it was plain that the possession of the lower valley was essential to the success of any future offensive on a great scale. If Allenby abandoned the valley, his one avenue for a further advance would be the plain of Sharon on the west, and, with the Turks concentrated against him there, his prospect of breaking through would be slight. He therefore decided that either the valley must be occupied and the river controlled from the Dead Sea to the Auja, or, if he withdrew from the low land, he must be prepared to re-occupy the area and seize the crossings as a preliminary to his next attack in strength. He put the position in this way to Chauvel, and gave the Australian

leader the choice between actually remaining in the valley and withdrawing to the heights behind Jericho, with the understanding that, when the chosen moment came, he must be prepared to cross the river again.

Chauvel decided to remain in the valley. "There were three reasons why it should be held," he explains in his brief history of Desert Mounted Corps, prepared for the Commonwealth Government, "the first, because the road from the Turkish railway at Amman, crossing the Jordan at Ghoraniye, was always a serious menace to our right flank; the second, because it would be necessary to retake it before the advance in the spring, and it was considered that it would be less costly in lives to hold it; and the third, because it was desired to hoodwink the enemy by the display of a large force and constant activity on that flank. The Turkish High Command had already paid our mounted troops the compliment, in several 'appreciations' which had come into our hands, of assuming that, in whatever part of our line they were in evidence, it was from there we might be expected to strike. In the jumble of hills overlooking the Jericho plain, which was the only alternative, there was neither space nor water for a large body of cavalry. It was, therefore, decided to hold the Jordan valley and do what we could to combat disease. Though our losses from malaria were considerable, the heat intense, and the dust worse than our troops had hitherto experienced, the ultimate results more than justified this decision."

Chauvel, who had established his headquarters beside the new Jericho road, about one and a half miles to the east of Talat ed Dumm, was made responsible for the valley sector. Between his left flank in the foot-hills about Musallabeh, and the right of the XX Corps upon Samaria, was a gap of some miles; but the region was so rough as to be practically impassable to an enemy force. The valley defences were cut into two sectors, the dividing line running from the Auja bridge-head on the east across the plain to a point slightly north of Jericho. Chaytor, with Anzac Mounted Division, the 181st Infantry Brigade, and the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, was given the southern sector, including Ghoraniye and the Dead Sea. In the north Hodgson, with the Australian

Mounted Division, the Camel Brigade, the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, the 22nd Mounted Brigade, and the 383rd Siege Battery, held the Auja bridgehead, the line along the Wady Mellahah, and the foot-hills about Musallabeh. Ghoraniye bridgehead was occupied by the Londoners of the 181st Brigade; Wilson was given the assistance of some Indian infantry for the heavy work on the Auja defences; and the 5th Mounted Brigade relieved the Camels on the Mellahah sector, which had been held by the 4th Battalion, under Mills.

The Es Salt operations marked the end of the brief, hard-fighting career of the Imperial Camel Brigade. This force, under the quiet, capable leadership of Brigadier-General Smith, V.C., had at Magdhaba, Rafa, and the two Gaza engagements brilliantly justified its formation, although even in those fights it had achieved nothing which could not have been done by the same men mounted on horses. After the breaking of the Gaza-Beersheba line, when the pace of the mounted troops became faster, the camels were in most operations easily outmarched by the horses. The greatest usefulness of the camel force was, as would be expected, in the early days upon the western desert against the Senussi, and later upon the desert wastes of Sinai, when it fought as companies. Had the brigade been formed earlier, its influence upon the desert campaign would have been material; but, when it was created, the desert was behind, and the men would probably have been of greater value to both Murray and Allenby if they had been mounted on horses. This was the opinion of Chauvel and Allenby when, after the withdrawal of the brigade from Jordan valley, the decision was taken to dismount the men from the camels. For a time their future was in doubt; but, after consultation with the Commonwealth Government, the Australians of the brigade were given horses and formed into the 14th and 15th Light Horse Regiments; to these were added a few months later a French colonial regiment of Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique, and the three regiments became the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade, at first under Brigadier-General C. L. Gregory, and later under Brigadier-General George Macarthur Onslow, who was promoted from the command of the 7th Australian Light Horse Regiment. The New Zealanders of the Camel

Brigade supplied the machine-gun squadron for the new brigade; the Australians who had made up the Camel ambulance were mounted on horses and transferred to Onslow as a complete unit. The British battalion of the Camel Brigade retained their camels, and were sent to operate against the Hejaz railway south-east of the Dead Sea.

Onslow, a descendant of John Macarthur—notorious for his quarrel with Governor Bligh in the very early days of the settlement at Port Jackson, and famous as the founder of the merino-sheep industry in Australia—went to the new brigade with a brilliant record as a regimental leader. Although no deep student of tactics, he had, as an Australian countryman, a very shrewd sense of ground, and was by instinct a dashing leader of horse. Fiery in temper, but gallant and generous in bearing, no light horse leader rode harder or straighter in action than George Onslow. His men of the 7th Regiment had trusted him implicitly and followed him blindly, and as a vanguard in serious operations they had no peers in Palestine.

Summer came down swiftly on the Jordan valley. In the last week of April, when the troops had moved upon Gilead, the sun was hot, but tolerable. A week later, when they returned from those bracing heights, the heat was terrific; the valley was already deep in fine dust; flies swarmed by day, and mosquitoes made sleep difficult at night. "A sweltering hot day," runs one of the diary entries for May 10th; "little doing except the flies." Each day the temperature rose; under the constant heavy traffic which was necessary for the maintenance of so many mounted brigades the dust became deeper and finer, and, as the horsemen and drivers sought new tracks, the plain over many square miles became floored with a deep bed of light powdered clay, which rose in the still, heavy atmosphere and loomed in a cloud over the whole valley. For weeks at a stretch the shade temperature was rarely below 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and occasionally rose to 125 degrees. Had the air been light, the heat alone would have been a menace to health. But the southern end of the great gorge lies 1,290 feet below sea-level, and 4,000 feet below the mountains overshadowing it on either side. Blinded and choked by the dust, with rifles and tools almost too hot to touch,

harassed by flies and mosquitoes and a strange plague of stinging scorpions, great black spiders, snakes, and other venomous creatures, insect or reptile, which seemed in keeping with that infernal region, the troops were weighed down with a sense of physical oppression due to the abnormal weight of the atmosphere and its excessive moisture.¹ Rations reached the lines in regular supply, but in a condition which would have revolted any men but soldiers on active service. The bread was dry and unpalatable as chaff; the beef, heated and reheated in its tins, came out like so much string and oil. The men's "bivvy" sheets gave little shelter from the fierce sun by day, and the heat and insects made sleep almost impossible at night. And upon this threshold of hell the men were called upon not only to hold their line against an aggressive enemy, elated with his recent successes, but had for many weeks to engage in severe physical labour.

The Gilead operations, and the increasing activity of the Arabs at Maan, had led to the concentration of large Turkish forces east of the river. This partition of the enemy's strength—while it weakened his main body on the west, and so ultimately played into British hands—was at the time a serious menace to Chauvel's position. Either the British defences had to be dug and wired, and made as strong as possible, or the man-power had to be multiplied. Allenby's policy was to subject as few men as possible to the evil conditions; all troops were therefore called upon to work at high pressure with pick and shovel and in the construction of the wire entanglements. The willingness and capacity of the Australian soldier for hard work always called forth the surprise and admiration of British officers; and nowhere in the war was a heavy, uninteresting task carried on under more distressing conditions, or with less complaint and greater efficiency, than in the valley of the Jordan. Many miles of trenches were dug on the flat, countless sangars built on the stony foot-hills, and at the same time large gangs of men cleared tracks and laid down roads for the transport. The campaign against the mosquitoes, as a preventive of malaria, in itself imposed a very heavy burden. Directed by medical

¹ It is estimated that the Jordan discharges an average of over 6,000,000 tons of water a day into the Dead Sea, all of which is lost by evaporation during the summer months.

officers and engineers, the troops toiled ceaselessly in the heat to clean the occupied area of all standing water.

The one generous feature of the valley was its water-supply. The Jordan, perennially fed by the meltings from snow-clad Hermon in the north, which were supplemented on its swift course towards the Dead Sea by many spring-fed streams from the ranges east and west, ran deep and fresh all through the summer. Its waters, although slightly muddy, were always pure and reviving to the thirsty troops. Ghoraniye bridgehead had, in addition to the river, the clear waters of the Wady Nimrin, which has its source in a strong spring bursting from the rocks in the town of Es Salt. On the west side there was first the Wady Kelt, trickling down from the wilderness to Jericho, where it is joined, about a mile from the village, by the generous flow of the spring at Ain es Sultan, which is sufficient to enable the natives to engage lazily in a little irrigated cultivation. A little farther north the Wady Nueiameh, gushing from Ain ed Duk in the foothills, runs north-east into the Jordan, and never failed in its supply; farther north the Auja, rising high in the range, flowed freely all through the hot season. The men in the firing line suffered temporary discomfort, being dependent on the limited and heated supply in their bottles; but troops moving on the plain were constantly in touch with running water.

The scrubby swamps which in places skirt the Jordan could not be drained; but the troops were, as far as possible, kept away from these mosquito-breeding areas. Along the tributary wadys, where most of the camps were located, all standing water was drained off; the courses of the streams were contained within lines of carefully placed stones; the watering of horses, except at canvas troughs to which water was lifted by pumping, was forbidden, because of the holes made by hoofs along the margins. Within a few weeks the breeding of mosquitoes over most of the occupied plain had been arrested, and the menace of malaria substantially reduced. The medical officers and their men, under the direction of Colonel Downes, the distinguished Australian who was now in charge of the medical service of Desert Mounted Corps, worked with the utmost devotion, and by their labours prevented the entire destruction of the force. But despite all

their efforts cases of malaria were reported during May, and the fever steadily developed. As the heat and dust increased, the overworked men became very low in physical tone, and had very little power of resistance to sickness. In addition to malaria, minor maladies became very prevalent; thousands of the men suffered from blood troubles known as "sand-fly fever" and "five-day fever," which were accompanied by excessive temperatures followed by temporary prostration; few escaped severe stomach disorders.

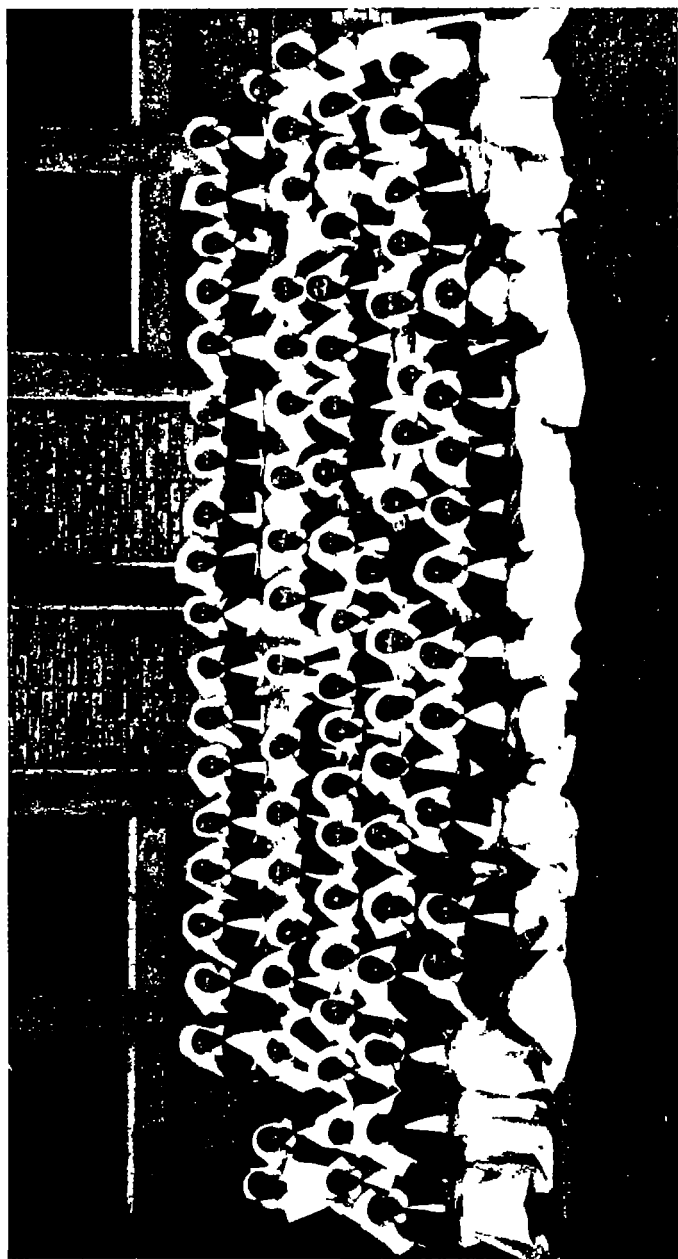
At the height of summer the grim, still atmosphere, bearing always its dense cloud of dust, seemed to the exhausted troops to possess a sinister note of doom. Perhaps it was fortunate for the brigades that their front line was usually active, and that there was so much manual labour to occupy the troops in support. From both sides of the river the enemy persistently shelled the advanced positions, as well as the headquarters in their rear, and so kept the British alert and active. With that amazing spirit which sustains troops in the most grim situations, the light horsemen faced the ordeal with a brave show of good humour. They took a sporting interest in each fresh "record" temperature, in the dust as it became deeper and more blinding, and in the "willy-willies," or whirlwinds, always in sight, which sometimes rose in vast, dense columns to the height of the ranges on either side of the gorge. Stings from scorpions, which were extremely painful and necessitated medical treatment, were the subject of infinite jest. Championship combats between rival scorpions and black spiders would be surrounded and cheered by scores of dusty men behind the lines. But the chief recreation was swimming in the swift current of the river. All day horses were bathed at the shallow fords; and the men, slipping into the stream, would float happily down, careless of the long walk back through the scrub and over the burning clay along the banks. Coarse fish were plentiful in the river, but were too well-fed and sluggish to take the bait, and the soldier's rough but profitable method of fishing with bombs was forbidden. One evening a young light horse troop-leader was dining at Desert Mounted Corps, in a mess chiefly made up of British staff officers. He remarked that his troop had enjoyed a good deal of fish that morning for breakfast. The



BRIGADIER-GENERAL G. M. MACARTHUR ONSLOW, COMMANDER OF THE 5TH AUSTRALIAN
LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE, 1018-10, AND HIS STAFF.

Just as we can afford Photo No. B384

To face 611



NURSES OF NO 14 AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL, PORT SAID, 1918 (MATRON ROSE CRFAL IN CENTRE)

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B659.

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sporting staff officers were keenly interested. What bait did he use? As the Australian youngster opened his mouth to reply, he caught a warning glance from a friend. "Worms," he replied; and, pressed for details, he explained how Australians in the back country in summer secured worms for bait by putting down an empty sack and keeping it wet for a few days. The staff was delighted at the prospect of sport along the Jordan. As the visitor walked away from the mess with an Australian friend, the latter asked him what bait he had really used. "Mills bombs," he replied.

Reference to the medical work in the Jordan valley recalls the loyalty, self-sacrifice, and striking capacity with which the Australian Army Medical Corps served the fighting men all the way from the Canal to Aleppo. The fearless mounted stretcher-bearers and the regimental doctors were on the heels of the light horsemen in every hot action. From the firing line down through the brigade ambulances and casualty clearing stations to the great No. 14 Australian General Hospital in Cairo (and afterwards at Port Said), the work of the medical officers and their staffs was not only distinguished by its efficiency but was ever graced by the pride and affection with which these men sought to relieve the wounded and sick from the ground of battle. All the subsidiary light horse services showed the same sincere humility; they denied any claim to rank with the man who bore the rifle, and, strong in their pride of him, served him day and night and year after year with all their heart and endeavour. Nor are there words in which to tell of the service of the splendid band of Australian nursing sisters who, under the inspiration of the late Miss Rose Creal,² matron at the No. 14 General Hospital, greeted the battered men from the front as they reached hospital and nursed them back to strength, or softened the close of their soldier-life. No womanhood has ever presented a richer association of feminine tenderness and sheer capacity. They were true sisters to the fighting sons of Australian pioneers.

Few great men are free of foibles, and General Allenby was no exception. Always a severe disciplinarian, he was

² Matron Rose Creal, R.R.C. Aust. Army Nursing Service. Of Sydney, N.S.W., b The Welcome, near Parkes, N.S.W., 3 Nov., 1865 Died of illness in Australia, 7 Aug., 1921.

insistent upon correct dressing; and his weakness, carried to extremes, added heavily to the suffering of the troops in the Jordan valley in the early part of the summer. When he was an army commander in France, it is told that he once brought his corps commanders and their staff officers many miles to a conference in Arras, at which his chief business was to impress upon them that the kilted Scots must be more adequately clothed, and to insist upon the indecency of allowing infantrymen to drill in the heat of summer in their shirt-sleeves. So in the Jordan valley he showed anger at the sight of light horsemen riding about in infantry "shorts." After the advance from Gaza he had established his headquarters in the spacious house of a German orchardist at Bir Salem, close to Ramleh, where, installed amidst gardens and a beautiful plantation of young eucalyptus trees, and fanned by breezes from the Mediterranean, his staff enjoyed ideal living conditions. But he himself, continuing to take a very close personal interest in his advanced line, might on any day be seen on the dusty roads, and was a frequent visitor to the Jordan flank. He objected to "shorts" partly on the ground that they were unsoldierly for mounted men, partly because there had been isolated cases of blood-poisoning, caused by the men's bare legs rubbing against the heated horses. During the April reconnaissance against Shunet Nimrin an Australian leader on the flank, who after two hours' vexatious delay had succeeded in getting touch by heliograph with his brigade and was sending in an urgent operation message, was held up while he received a heliograph to say that the Commander-in-Chief was in the valley, and that any officer whose men were found in "shorts" would be severely dealt with. The result of the prohibition was that for some time the men were condemned to ride and work in their heavy riding-breeches and leggings, and were constantly saturated with perspiration, though without a change of clothing. Afterwards strong representations were made, a compromise was reached, and the men were allowed to ride in long "slacks" of khaki drill.

For the troops holding the line in the bridgeheads and along the Mellahah, the monotony of this period was in some degree relieved by mounted patrolling in front of the trenches. This work, generally done at night and in the early morning,

was carried forward for some miles. The patrols usually drew fire, frequently had brushes with Turkish cavalry, and captured little parties which were endeavouring in the dark to reach the Jordan for water. After about a month in the valley the brigades were moved in turn for a brief rest to the hills about Bethlehem. On the ranges the summer days were sunny but cool and the nights misty and keen. Full rations were supplemented by fresh fruit and vegetables; men and horses, riding up from the frightful furnace in the valley, rejoiced in the change, and after a few days and nights of heavy sleep took a keen interest again in the sights and life of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Each day "leave parties" rode into the two old towns, visited the sacred places, and spent their money in the indifferent shops and bazaars. The behaviour of all troops about the holy places was always extraordinarily good; any slight trouble caused occasionally by excessive drinking was due almost entirely to the foolish British policy of pandering excessively to native susceptibilities. Again and again Australian officers urged vigorous action against natives who entered their lines to sell strong drink of local manufacture and execrable quality; but so nervous was the administration that even flagrant wrongdoers, recognised by the populace as worthless, were allowed to practise their vices without punishment. In the circumstances both British and Australian leaders were impatient when complaint was made about isolated instances of excess.

But, if the British officers responsible for the administration of the occupied enemy territory erred on the side of clemency to a degree which prejudiced the welfare of the troops, they accomplished wonderful things in the improvement of Palestine, especially in Jerusalem and the other large towns. Colonel Huggett, General Allenby's financial adviser, an officer of singular ability and capacity for work, was mainly responsible for the pioneering of this remarkable achievement, and a small staff quickly altered all the centres of population from insanitary places with a factious and chaotic local administration into wholesome and soundly governed areas. As is usual in civilised warfare, the laws of the deposed enemy were scrupulously followed, and taxes were collected on the Turkish basis. But where there had been Eastern sloth, filth, and corruption, there was now British

efficiency driven by the dreaded personality of General Allenby and by British justice, which, operating impartially and cleanly between natives of many faiths and races, moved the wonder and even tickled the humour of the incredulous inhabitants. Within a few weeks of its occupation, Jerusalem was transformed from the most unsavoury city in the world into a clean and fragrant town. While Allenby was being harassed with demands for many of his best troops for service in France, and was at the same time planning for his daring blow at Damascus and Aleppo, his engineers found time to develop the ancient water-supply at Solomon's Pools (a few miles south of Bethlehem), and also to revive and bring into operation after centuries of idleness the old flow in the Wady Arrub, farther south on the Hebron road, which had been drawn upon by Pontius Pilate. Pure water from these two sources was carried in pipes into Jerusalem. At the same time Englishmen, drawn from all parts of the world where there is British rule over native peoples, were pushing, with that splendid tact and capacity which marks such bodies as the Indian Civil Service, into all the occupied villages, seeking out and co-operating with the head men, and startling them with that curious attribute of the race, British fair play. Everywhere existing institutions were taken as the basis of improvements; in consequence the natives were not antagonised, but lent themselves, as soon as they were convinced that they were not to be exploited, willingly and even enthusiastically to the revival of their industries and the improvement of their districts.

At all stages in the campaign the light horsemen were affectionately remembered and served by their friends in Australia and by the capable field representatives of various philanthropic bodies. But at no time was this devotion so fully appreciated as during this terrible summer. Of all the British troops engaged in the war, few suffered isolation from their homes so prolonged and absolute as the Australians and New Zealanders who served in Gallipoli and afterwards in Palestine. A few scores of officers received brief leave to the Dominions or to England; but for more than four years the men in the ranks were denied all touch with their own people, or, in fact, with any civilised white society, apart from the occupants of the Jewish villages during brief seasons in 1918.

Shut out of the good hotels in Cairo, they got so little pleasure out of their occasional leave from the front line, that men frequently applied for permission to return to their regiments before the completion of their holiday. To these men the service of such organisations as the Australian Comforts Fund, always handled with marked efficiency and economy (in the late stages by Major R. S. Goward³), the Young Men's Christian Association, and Mrs Chisholm's canteens, went far to soften a harsh and bloody campaign in an evil and alien land. The work of all these services deserves more description and commendation than is possible in these pages.

Mrs. Alice Chisholm's⁴ work was a very bright example of the devotion of Australia's womanhood to the distant troops. Early in the war this Sydney lady, on her own initiative and mainly with her own money, established a canteen at Heliopolis. Soon after the mounted troops moved into Sinai, Miss Rout, a New Zealander, opened an advanced canteen at Kantara, practically in defiance of the army leaders; but, falling ill, she handed it over to Mrs. Chisholm, who meanwhile had shifted her canteen to Port Said, where many Australians and New Zealanders spent their brief periods of leave. The venture at Kantara was joined by Miss Rania McPhillamy,⁵ the daughter of a well-known pastoralist in the Forbes district of New South Wales, and was so welcomed by the lonely troops that its expansion was of a remarkable character. Soon these two noble Australian women were at the head of a large establishment which, employing a great staff, made up mainly of Egyptians, was able to supply meals and refreshments to thousands of troops daily. British and Australians were treated alike; and at one time, when an infantry division was in camp on the Canal, the canteen was cooking upwards of sixty thousand eggs a day. In the summer of 1918 Miss McPhillamy, with General Allenby's cordial approval and assistance, opened a branch canteen at Jerusalem, and after the Armistice she moved to the Anzac Mounted Division at Rafa. Another admirable institution

³ Maj. R. S. Goward, M.B.E. Public accountant; of Ashfield, Sydney, N.S.W. b. Ashfield, 16 Feb., 1891.

⁴ Dame Alice Chisholm, D.B.E. Of Woollahra and Pennant Hills, N.S.W.; b. Reevesdale, Bungonia, N.S.W., 3 July, 1856.

⁵ Mrs. Clive Single, wife of Lieut.-Col. C. V. Single, of Moree, N.S.W., late commanding 4th Light Horse Field Ambulance.

was the Australian Imperial Force Canteens, which, worked up by Lieutenant J. J. Trickett^a from a very modest beginning in the face of much opposition, rapidly expanded until there was a highly mobile canteen attached to each Australian brigade; and by the employment of light motor-cars supplies were never far from the light horsemen, even in action. Trickett's initiative and enthusiasm were boundless, and when the troops were in the Jordan valley he crowned his efforts by opening an iced-soda fountain near Jericho. But there was old-time precedent for all, or nearly all, that was achieved by the youthful genius of the Australians in Palestine: in Antony's sensuous days the imperial Roman toasted Cleopatra at Jericho in bumpers iced by snow carried all the way from Hermon.

^a Maj. J. J. Trickett, O.B.E. Sales Manager, of Sandringham, Melb., Vic.; b. Windsor, Melb., 9 May, 1882.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RE-ORGANISATION AND PREPARATION

ALLENBY went to Palestine to take the offensive; he was aggressive by temperament and at no time faltered in his determination to drive the enemy. Before Jerusalem had fallen, and two months before his objective on the line of the "two Aujas" had been reached, he was unfolding to the War Office plans for carrying the war still further north. On 2nd January, 1918, Whitehall asked of him an explicit statement of his intentions for the next big advance; at the same time the War Office gave him an estimate of the strength of the enemy forces which in the near future he might have to meet. At that time, apparently, the British Government was undecided about the ultimate scope of the Palestine operations, for the despatch began by saying, "The question of the future policy in Palestine has not yet been settled by the Cabinet." After reference to the enemy's recent losses, and the probability that his morale was then low, it continued; "Nevertheless we estimate that you might possibly be opposed before long by 60,000 combatants, including 11,000 Germans, and that this force might be increased to 70,000 or even 80,000 by the middle of February. We are inclined to believe that further increase would be prevented by transport difficulties." In his reply on January 3rd Allenby said that his aim in his next advance was to occupy a line roughly from Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee, on the east, to a point just north of Acre on the west. That would give him a secure right flank on the Jordan, as well as possession of the Esdraelon plain, which, extending eastwards from Haifa and Acre, cuts through the ranges of western Palestine between the slopes of southern Galilee and the mountains of Samaria. The Turkish Palestine railway, branching off from the Hejaz line at Deraa, and crossing the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee, linked up with Haifa on the coast; a branch running south from El Afule served the armies on Samaria and the plain of Sharon. The seizure of it by the British would destroy all Turkish connections by rail between the country west of the Jordan and the north, and would leave the enemy

only the one road from Tiberias to Damascus, which crosses the river at Jisr Benat Yakub, south of Lake Huleh, and which was at that time in a wretched state for transport.

Allenby said he was confident that—provided the Turks did not exceed 70,000, and he was allowed to retain his present force, to “keep it up to establishment,” and to obtain the 7th Indian Division as well—he could hold Palestine as far as the Tiberias-Acre line. He did not think that the enemy, with his single metre-gauge railway, could maintain more than 65,000 or 70,000 troops, but if the Turkish force was increased to 70,000 or 80,000 men by the middle of February, “it is probable that any effective advance of the British line would be impossible without an increase in my force.” On 30th October, 1917, his fighting strength in cavalry and infantry had been 97,000. At the end of the year it was 69,000. “I could not deploy more troops,” said Allenby, “even if I had them, until my railway is doubled. Since operations began, it has not been possible to continue the doubling of the line eastwards of Mazar. Railway progress has been much delayed by the wet weather, and is now much less than half-a-mile a day, and the line already in use has been much damaged.”

While these messages were being exchanged, Germany was already preparing to fling all her available strength against the Allies on the Western Front; and the strong reinforcements to the enemy's force in Palestine indicated by the War Office were never sent. But, as we have seen, by April Allenby's army was disorganised and weakened by the withdrawal of British troops and the substitution of Indians. The enemy force opposed to him was not substantially increased; but with his own strength diminishing, and considering the necessity of training the Indian troops up to battle-pitch and making their leaders familiar with the country, he was unable to contemplate the general offensive which he had previously hoped for about midsummer. His strength was also in some measure reduced by the two fruitless raids east of Jordan, and by the abortive attempt on the western sector in April. He accepted the delay and, while re-organising his army, threw much energy into the extension and duplication of his railways. Fortunately the long, dry Palestine summer

permitted a few months' delay, while still leaving before the wet season sufficient time for operations on a grand scale.

The doughty 52nd Division of Lowlanders was embarked for France in the first week of April, its place being taken by the 7th (Meerut) Division from Mesopotamia. A week later the 74th Division left Palestine; but the 3rd (Lahore) Division from Mesopotamia, which was to make good the loss, did not complete its disembarkation in Egypt before the middle of June. While the two British infantry divisions were being withdrawn, Allenby had also to send to France nine yeomanry regiments—which meant the breaking up of Barrow's Yeomanry Division less than a year after its formation. In addition his line was stripped of ten British infantry battalions, five-and-a-half siege batteries, and five machine-gun companies. Indian cavalry, which since 1914 had been almost in complete idleness in France, replaced the nine regiments of yeomanry and became the 4th Cavalry Division under Barrow; while Indian battalions drawn direct from India, and without fighting experience in the war, replaced the ten battalions of British infantry. In July and August the cutting down was carried further by the lack of reinforcements, which compelled Allenby to use up ten of his remaining British battalions to cover wastage, Indian battalions being employed in their place. A little later sufficient Indian cavalry had arrived to enable the formation of the 5th Cavalry Division under Major-General H. Macandrew. The 5th Mounted Brigade (now known as the 13th Cavalry Brigade) was placed in this new division, and its place was taken in Australian Mounted Division by the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade under Onslow. Sufficient yeomanry remained to provide one regiment of British horsemen to each brigade of the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, which is the usual custom with Indian brigades. Two more regiments remained as corps mounted troops with the infantry.

Allenby's infantry force was thus reduced substantially in numbers by demands arising out of the critical position in France. But the reduction in numbers did not fully express the actual loss. The British infantry sent to France was acclimatised and experienced. It had, after its stern training south of Gaza in 1917, displayed fighting qualities of the

highest order; it had clearly established its superiority over the enemy under the most varying battle conditions; and, uplifted by its succession of victories, was ideal material for further offensive work. Indian troops had already in the campaign fought with dash and persistence; but the new battalions were raw, and in need of training and front-line experience, before they could be depended upon for stern work against strong opposition. But the Commander-in-Chief, if he was temporarily crippled by the change in his infantry, ultimately gained strength on his mounted side by the compulsory changes. The yeomanry regiments were a serious loss. In Barrow's strong and capable hands these British horsemen from the shires had become cavalry of a high order. They never rivalled the Australians and New Zealanders in the subtle work of reconnaissance and patrol, but, led by regular cavalry officers, they had, as their fine charges on the Philistine plain demonstrated, become great shock-troops, and every leader in Palestine deplored the necessity of sending them to do infantry work in France. The Indian cavalry, however, which took their place, possessed all the qualities necessary for the next phase of Allenby's operations. Regular lancers of long training, superbly mounted—most of them on horses of Australian breeding—and efficiently led, they came to Palestine rejoicing to be clear of the uncongenial climate and the inactivity of France. Beautiful horsemen and expert with the lance, they were also quick and shrewd observers, and were therefore at once at home when in May they moved under Barrow to the Jordan valley and engaged in the work of patrol in advance of the firing line. Their keenness for action was almost excessive; their galloping swoops on unfortunate isolated parties of Turks added to the fear which the enemy already felt of the British mounted troops. With Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps command increased to four divisions, Allenby engaged with much happy anticipation in the preparation of the grand scheme, which, giving full scope to his 30,000 horsemen, was to bring the campaign to its sweeping and dramatic conclusion.

He had successfully resisted a proposal from the War Office that the Australian Mounted Division should be dis-

mounted and sent to France. Just as Murray had early in the campaign declared that the Australians were "the keystone of the defence of Egypt," and that not a single one of them could be spared, so Allenby now recognised that the loss of more than half his light horsemen might easily lead to stagnation and even to disaster. The Indians were dashing and promising, but they were still in a large measure untried, and it might have been fatal to reduce further the support and stiffening of absolutely reliable white troops. There was no doubt about the behaviour of the Indians in an established swinging offensive, but there was no certainty about their bearing in the face of prolonged adversity. Already both Chauvel and Allenby were gravely concerned about the heavy and always growing wastage in the troops in the Jordan valley. Not only were malaria and other diseases permanently crippling large numbers of men, but the whole force was becoming very exhausted; and there was fear that, when the time came to advance, their striking power would not be capable of a prolonged effort. Strong representations succeeded, and the Australians were allowed to remain in Palestine.

As the Indian battalions reached the line in increasing numbers they were freely exercised in raids, and a series of successful adventures against the enemy's trenches went far to give them the experience and confidence which they needed for a general attack. Their enthusiasm was boundless, and they were quick to recognise that they were opposed by an enemy whose spirit was low and whose interest in the struggle was dissipating. Nearly all the intelligence reports about the Turks during the summer months made cheery reading for the British. The quarrels among the enemy's High Command became more acute; the strain on the single narrow-gauge railway was excessive; supplies were short and irregular. Germany's colossal stroke against the British before Amiens in March, followed by other successes on the Western Front, were exultingly and loudly advertised in Syria and Palestine; coupled with the British failures east of Jordan, they for the moment excited the confidence of the enemy. But the stolid Turkish soldier paid little heed to German reports. Like experienced troops on all fronts, he

was too well accustomed to seeing his own victories exaggerated, and his failures explained away, to lend his ear to Germany's proud claims of decisive victory. For three years he had been told these stories, but still the war went on, and still he was far distant from his family and his simple home. His religious fanaticism had long since burned itself out; his dreams of conquest and rich prizes were abandoned; by the summer of 1918 he was conscious only that he had suffered many defeats and constant hardships, and was fighting under compulsion in a country only Turkish in name and for a cause which no longer appealed to him. Great natural campaigner as he was, he was disgusted with this purposeless and monotonous fighting as a selfless unit of the vast alien German war-machine. And so, when in July and August the Indians, supported in the more serious enterprises by British infantry, boldly raided his trenches, he offered but feeble resistance and seemed pleased to be taken prisoner. Still more stimulating to the British army was the steady and growing trickle of deserters during the summer. These men, arriving each night, were in no mood to be secretive about the enemy's dispositions, and while their desertion in itself was evidence of the low spirit of the Turkish armies, they brought also much exact and valuable information. Some of the enemy's divisions, however, were not represented in this wastage; and, as showing how surely desertion is an index to morale, it was the sound divisions which resisted most strongly the British attack in September.

Although Allenby's pleading had prevented the loss of the Australian Mounted Division, British troops were, as late as June, withdrawn to France. In protesting against the further weakening of his army, the Commander-in-Chief had urged the rawness of the Indian recruits ("of whom a large number have not even fired a musketry course"), the expected reinforcement of the enemy's strength after the harvest, and the danger that the Arabs might, if the British were unable to give them active support east of Jordan, be driven south again by a Turkish counter-attack. But the War Office was adamant. Allenby was informed on June 21st that "the Government had no option but to take the risk involved in withdrawing these troops from your

command in view of the situation in France, which is and must remain extremely critical."

But if Allenby was keenly disappointed, his stout offensive spirit showed no sign of faltering. He continued to plan and act as a leader completely confident of an overwhelming victory; and through the long hot summer the troops were cheered by abounding evidence of constructive work, which every soldier knew was the preliminary to great action. Believing he would be able to advance by midsummer, the Commander-in-Chief had established a comprehensive advanced-railhead at Ludd, two or three miles north of the Jaffa road. Here in the wide olive-groves great workshops had sprung up, and huge dumps had been established. Trains branching off from Ludd to Jerusalem supplied the XX Corps on Samaria and the Desert Mounted Corps in the Jordan valley. The delay in operations, however, made the arrangement an undesirable one. Ludd was within range of the enemy's long-range guns; a slight enemy advance down the plain of Sharon would have placed it in danger, and might easily have dislocated the communications of the British right and centre. Allenby therefore decided, instead of duplicating the main line from Egypt up to Ludd, to supply Jerusalem by a branch line north-east across the Philistine plain through Irgeig and Junction Station. This switch gave him an alternative and safe line of communications, and at the same time enabled much of the material concentrated at Ludd to be withdrawn from the danger zone. During June forty miles of new broad-gauge track were laid, and in that month the traffic over the military railways exceeded 168,000 tons.

Meanwhile the training of the Indians was pushed on at high pressure, and the two new Australian light horse regiments formed out of the Camel Brigade were given their horses and schooled afresh. Many of the men had originally been in the light horse, but perhaps half of them had been drawn from infantry, and of these many had never been accustomed to horses. The spirit of service never shone more brightly than in their training camps near the Jaffa road, where the two regiments—including many who had been in Gallipoli in 1915—began again, like recruits, upon the elementary drill of the new arm. Good humour, and resolution

to become expert light horsemen as quickly as possible, marked the few weeks allowed for their education.

While building up his own forces for a renewal of the offensive, Allenby was not without fear of a strong enemy attack, and from the sea to the Jordan bridgeheads there were ceaseless digging and wiring on the front line and advanced posts, and also in the preparation of reserve positions. All through the summer the air force contributed to the spirits of the men in the trenches and the Arabs across the river. From the middle of 1917 the British and Australian pilots had been treated with increasing generosity by the War Office. Their old and obsolete machines, in which they had waged unequal battle, had been replaced by craft superior to those now possessed by the Germans. Ever on the offensive, they moved daily over the enemy's lines, seeking their foes in battle, and at the same time bombed mercilessly and effectively points of concentration on his rear. Amman and other places on the Hejaz line were freely raided, and the same harassing work was maintained west of the Jordan. The No. 1 Australian Squadron, located on the old enemy aerodrome near Ramleh, had by sheer performance become recognised as a great battle-squadron, and was at the same time conspicuous as a model of efficiency in all mechanical work and administration. Its excellence had its drawbacks. General Headquarters dropped into the habit of recommending all British and Allied officers who came to the front to call and see how a squadron should be conducted; the number of visitors consequently became embarrassing. Its commanding officer, Major R. Williams,¹ who was responsible for its organisation and development, was a young Australian of marked capacity.

As the summer advanced, the Arabs increased their activities all along the Hejaz railway, and gave more concern to the Turks. Maan was closely invested, and railway communication further south suspended. As their activities were extended northwards, the Beni Sakr tribe—which had so falsely promised support before the Es Salt operations—became definitely hostile to the Turks, and began raids on the

¹ Air Vice-Marshal R. Williams, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., p.s.a. Chief of the Air Staff, R.A.A.F.; of Moonta, S. Aust., and Melbourne, Vic.; b. Moonta, 3 Aug., 1890

railway about Amman; while in May a force operating north of Deraa under Sherif Ali Ibn Hussein captured and burnt a supply train. When the Arabs declared their independence in July, 1916, the Turks had from 20,000 to 30,000 troops in the Hejaz. By April, 1918, Hussein's four sons had cleared the Red Sea coast, the railway had been repeatedly interrupted, Medina had been isolated for eight months, and Feisal had advanced 700 miles from Mecca to Tafele. Allenby estimated that during this period the Turks had in operations against the Arabs suffered 10,000 casualties in killed, wounded, and prisoners, and had also lost forty-seven guns and forty machine-guns, while the total Turkish force engaged or isolated by the rebels had been about 40,000 troops and 100 guns. Despite, therefore, the absence of discipline in the strange Arab host, their inferiority to the Turks as fighters, and their inability to storm such Turkish positions as Medina and Maan, they had already imposed a heavy additional strain on the enemy's fighting strength, and their active revolt had been of immense advantage to the British in western Palestine. Without their co-operation, spasmodic and uncertain as it was, the force opposed to Allenby would have been substantially stronger, his right flank would have been always exposed to heavy pressure, the local Arabs might have been openly hostile, and the whole course of the campaign must have been seriously affected.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ABU TELLUL

FROM the close of the Es Salt operations early in May until early in July, the Turks showed no disposition to attack. But partly from fear, and partly, perhaps, as a deliberate attempt to compel the British to keep a large force in Jordan valley and so suffer heavy wastage, they maintained steady pressure against Allenby's right flank. Visible movements of their troops, intermittent gunning, and accurate sniping all disclosed activity and readiness. Although forced by this policy to keep their troops also on the low ground, the enemy enjoyed many advantages over Chauvel's command. East of the river his main force confronting the bridgeheads was located in the foot-hills of Gilead, or on the eastern slopes of the range, which is, as we have seen, a region far less harsh than the Wilderness country on the west. Moreover, the Turks in the valley itself were, by their remarkable powers of resisting disease, better able to stand the ordeal of malaria and heat and dust than the British. This was illustrated by the fact that, while the British medical service laboured unceasingly to destroy mosquitoes and to ensure the health of the troops, the Turkish camps were, as usual, left to look after themselves. No fight was made against mosquitoes; no precautions were taken against insanitary conditions or impure water; yet it is probable that the enemy's wastage was considerably lighter than that of Chauvel's horsemen. When in September some of the Anzac regiments in their advance left their clean areas, and were compelled to camp even for one night on ground won from the enemy, they were assailed by swarms of mosquitoes, and within a few weeks nearly every man went down with malaria. In the regiments which moved directly across the river from the clean ground, and which gained the tableland without camping on low country evacuated by the enemy, the subsequent infection was relatively low. Had the Australians and New Zealanders spent the summer under Turkish conditions, they must have been annihilated.

Chauvel was never apprehensive about his two bridgeheads. Strong naturally, and with an unrivalled zone of fire, they

offered nothing but destructive losses to any enemy attack which was not preceded by a bombardment far beyond the capacity of the Turkish guns. A blow at the Mellahah sector might have gained local success; but, unless it was accompanied by the capture of the Abu Tellul positions, it would, as it was exploited, have laid the attackers open to an immediate counter-stroke on their right flank. Any concern Chauvel had about his valley defences was directed towards Musallabeh and the line of posts extending south-west into the hills.

Musallabeh formed the apex of a sharp local salient, based on the Auja. South-east from Musallabeh, about 2,000 yards away, a post was established on the rocky outcrop of El Maskerah, overlooking the plain; behind that to the west, at a distance of about 1,500 yards, was another detached post, placed high on a rocky eminence known as "The Bluff." Down the western side of the apex, across a rough valley and about 1,000 yards from Musallabeh, was "Vyse Post"; then, divided by sharp ravines, and proceeding south-west and south, the posts of "Vale," "View" and "Vaux," "Zoo" and "Zeiss"; after which posts continued a few miles further south-west into the rising hills. These posts were from 400 to 1,000 yards apart; they were wired and dug, or built up with stone sangars, and the intervening ravines were covered by light curtains of wire. Behind the posts ran the Wady Edh Dhib, a rugged crooked ravine, and across this to the south, lying irregularly east and west, rose the harsh stony ridge of Abu Tellul. This ridge, which gives its name to the whole area, was in reality the key of the situation; its possession commanded the fine stream of the Auja, which courses from the hills immediately to the south of the ridge. But, although a number of reserve posts had been prepared on its slopes, it was too close to the water to be used as a firing line, and was therefore covered by the advanced defences from Musallabeh to Vaux. The British batteries covering the posts were concealed in pockets south of the Tellul crest, on ground from which their removal in an emergency must have been laborious and slow. With the guns so close, and the indispensable water immediately behind, the position was one which must be held at all costs. No ground could be yielded, even for a few hours.

The weakness of the posts was the steep broken ground by which they were divided, and the equally rough country between them and the Turkish lines about 1,500 yards from their front. Particular care was given to their preparation. No area on the front received so much attention from leaders and staff. Brigadiers and divisional commanders freely visited the posts; Chauvel and his chief of staff, General Howard-Vyse, went over the troublesome ground in detail; the Commander-in-Chief went in person to satisfy himself that the best had been made of it. Yet, when all the brains of the army had been concentrated on it, it remained clear that, considering how few troops were available for the protection of the line of posts, the enemy could, by a resolute effort, at any time advance over "dead" ground, force his way through the intervening gorges, and reach the valley between the posts and Abu Tellul. All attempts to secure effective zones of machine-gun and rifle fire had failed, and it was recognised that the batteries could not put down a barrage sufficiently searching to block the enemy.

Cox's 1st Light Horse Brigade relieved Grant's 4th Brigade on the sector early in June, after having been in camp for three weeks on the Judæan hills near Bethlehem. That was the only spell the regiments of the 1st Brigade had enjoyed since February. The pressure on the tired men was otherwise unrelenting, and even on the upland the so-called rest was marked by schools for non-commissioned officers, Hotchkiss gunners, and signallers, with hard training generally for all ranks. Wastage had been heavy; owing to the failure of conscription in Australia reinforcements were scanty, and the brigade was substantially below strength when the men rode back to the valley.

The line from Zeiss Post to Musallabeh, which was the brigade sector, was held by two regiments, with the third in reserve about the Wady el Auja. In June the defences were still incomplete, and to ensure the position against assault men worked in the terrible heat as navvies are never called upon to work. As the ground was under easy observation from the high ground to the north-west, the digging and wiring and building of sangars (in which the reserve regiment actively participated) was pressed on throughout the night.

Sleep by day was made almost impossible by the extreme temperature, which rose as high as 128 degrees in the shade, and the men, though they had netting against the flies and mosquitoes, were tormented by myriads of vicious little sand-flies. Working at night they were often bitten by scorpions, while a swamp beside El Maskerah was infested with snakes, and sent forth swarms of the feared mosquitoes. Early in July Granville's 1st Regiment was in reserve, while Bourne with the 2nd held the right sector as far as Vyse and Bell with the 3rd the left from Vyse to Zeiss. Bell had only about 210 rifles available for the line—an index to the reduced state of the whole brigade.

During June and the first fortnight of July the enemy steadily increased his gun-fire upon the position. After harassing the posts with 77's and 4.2's, he added a battery of 5.9's to his bombarding artillery. But, as the cover was always improving, the Australian losses caused by this shelling were slight. At the same time the enemy freely shelled the horse-lines of the reserve regiment along the Auja, and at times inflicted severe casualties. Early in July movement of troops and a general increase in activity gave notice that an attack was imminent, despite a report from Intelligence that the Turks were embarrassed by water difficulties and contemplated a withdrawal from that part of the front. At this time, Bourne held Musallabeh with one squadron and a troop under Captain M. D. McDougall,¹ Maskerah with four troops and two machine-guns under Captain F. Evans,² and Vyse with four troops and two machine-guns under Major W. J. Brown; a detached bombing party was placed at "Vane Post," out in front of the main line, under orders to fall back on Vyse if heavily pressed. This left Bourne with three troops in reserve, of which he placed one on The Bluff and held two close to Vyse. Regimental Headquarters were situated in the Wady Dhib immediately behind Vale, which was held by a troop of the 3rd Regiment under Lieutenant H. E. McDonald, at this time under Bourne's command. Of Bell's regiment on the left one squadron under Major Dick occupied Vale, View, and Vaux, one squadron Zoo and Zeiss,

¹ Capt. M. D. McDougall, M.C. 2nd L.H. Regt. Grazier; of Warwick, Q'land; b. Brisbane, Q'land, 29 Apr., 1893.

² Maj F Evans, M.C., V.D., 2nd L.H. Regt. Miner; of Blackstone, Q'land; b. 2 Dec., 1885.

and one squadron was in reserve. The 4th Light Horse Brigade, on its withdrawal from the sector in June, had been held in camp a few miles south of the Auja as a general reserve in case of attack.

The attitude of the defenders was a remarkable one, and was based on the complete faith of brigade and regimental commands in their junior officers and men. It was anticipated that, when the blow fell, the line would be pierced between posts, and that the enemy would stream into the irregular valley between the posts and Abu Tellul. But it was confidently believed that the little garrisons would, even though isolated, stand firmly against the enemy for at least some hours—a resistance which would suffice for Granville's reserve regiment to appear on Abu Tellul and smash the enemy by a counter-stroke. That the enemy could in the face of water and transport difficulties advance in great strength was not anticipated. The assault was actually made in the darkness of the early morning of July 14th, and the spirit with which it was awaited was expressed a day or two before by Bell. He was asked if he thought the front line could stop a determined attack. "No," he replied, "they are bound to come through." "What of the posts?" he was asked. "The posts," he answered "will stand, unless they are withdrawn for tactical reasons or completely destroyed. Since we landed on the Peninsula (Gallipoli) I have not known a single instance of light horse troops, whether under officers or non-commissioned officers, having given up a position they were ordered to hold." Bell's faith in the men he led with so much distinction was fully justified by the events of the 14th.

Reserves of water for the posts had been stored in petrol-tins and a few hundred empty bottles which had remained after a very rare issue of beer. The troops were therefore safe against thirst for a day or two, and well equipped with munitions. Sure of a heavy and critical fight, but with no thought of anything but success, they awaited the expected struggle. On the 13th, the enemy's gun-fire had been unusually heavy, both on the posts and on the British batteries. Early in the night patrols were heard close to the Australian wire, and about an hour after midnight McDougall

reported from Musallabeh that the enemy appeared to be massing in the wadys ahead. Soon afterwards Dick reported that movement, apparently of a strong body of troops, could be heard about 1,000 yards in front of Vale and View, and Bell at once asked for a protective barrage by the British batteries, which promptly responded. Heavy shelling by the enemy for a time deadened the sound of his approach; it ceased suddenly, about 2.30 a.m., and the Australians could distinctly hear words of command shouted by German officers. It was then renewed for nearly an hour—the intensive fire destroyed communications between Bourne and brigade headquarters—but ceased abruptly about 3.30 a.m., when the enemy, a thousand strong, fell on Vale and the wired gaps on either side. Lieutenant McDonald, with about twenty men, could offer no effective resistance, and was at once withdrawn by Bourne, returned to Bell's command, and sent to one of the prepared positions on Abu Tellul. As the attack developed, Bourne, fearing Vale would be overrun, prepared to shift his headquarters. At the same time he sent one of his three reserve troops, under Lieutenant W. K. King, to occupy a post on the east of Abu Tellul, with orders to co-operate with the post on The Bluff in delaying the advance if the enemy should break through.

Immediately afterwards the enemy swarmed through Vale and up the ravines on either side, swept over Bourne's headquarters, and swung eastwards down the valley between the line of posts and the slopes of Abu Tellul. Bourne, with his staff and regimental details, withdrew to Abu Tellul, firing briskly as they went at the enemy close behind. At the same time a heavy assault was made on the garrison at Musallabeh. Cutting the entanglements in the darkness, the Germans bombed the light horsemen off one of the posts; but a spirited counter-attack, led by Sergeant J. E. Carlyon,³ at once drove them out, and, although they many times advanced resolutely against the four posts on the position, the Australians steadily held their ground. Vyse, to which the bombing party on Vane had retired, gallantly withstood the heavy frontal attack, but was soon completely surrounded.

³ Sgt J. E. Carlyon, M.M. (No. 498, 2nd L.H. Regt) Selector; b. Mitchell Q'land, 14 Oct., 1888.

At daylight the garrisons at Musallabeh and all the posts were isolated and under vigorous assault; but the light horsemen, not at all flustered and having good cover, were able to direct a very effective fire at close range on the enemy massed in their rear. The Germans, who were now climbing the slopes to the northern side of Abu Tellul and The Bluff, were directly behind and exposed to the machine-gun, Hotchkiss, and rifle fire of the garrisons at Vyse and Musallabeh, and were at the same time being enfiladed by Bell's men from View and Vaux. These two latter garrisons had poured heavy fire into the force which overran Vale in the darkness and had been largely responsible for its swing to the east. The posts were furiously attacked, but their garrisons could not be broken and they shot down and beat off wave after wave of the German infantry.

The post on Maskerah was now attacked from the rear, and Captain Evans rushed his men to an alternative position, already prepared, where they could hold their ground and at the same time bring fire to bear on a movement developing against The Bluff. The attack had unfolded very rapidly, and the situation was yet too obscure for Cox to commit Granville's reserve regiment. But when the Germans, despite the galling fire on their right flank and rear, began to climb the slopes of Abu Tellul and The Bluff, the position was becoming critical. Had they gained complete possession of Tellul, they might easily have withstood the counter-stroke of Granville's weak squadrons and seized the batteries immediately on the southern side; while if they received reinforcements, they might, even without capturing Tellul, still overcome the heroic resistance of the posts in their rear. The Bluff was at this moment occupied by one troop, less than twenty strong, under Lieutenant L. J. Henderson,⁴ and the extreme right post of Abu Tellul by Lieutenant King with a similar force. The two adjoining posts on the main ridge were manned by Bourne's regimental staff and a handful of details. As day broke the Germans marched in force upon the little garrisons under King and Henderson, and at the same time assailed the posts further to the west.

⁴ Lieut. L. J. Henderson, M.C. 2nd L.H. Regt. Graziar; b Jimboomba, Q'land, 14 Oct., 1889. Accidentally killed, in Australia, 1 Oct., 1919.

Bourne's orders were that the ground must be held at all costs, and the isolated parties of Queenslanders fought doggedly in the face of irresistible odds. King was killed while directing his men, but his gallant troop fought on and the Germans did not enter the post until every man had become a casualty. Henderson's men on The Bluff showed the same fine tenacity. Their young leader fell severely wounded, but continued to direct the unequal fight, and with only three men who were not killed or wounded kept the enemy outside the sangars. This heroic remnant were still on their ground when the fight closed.

Meanwhile the two posts further west on Abu Tellul had been fiercely engaged. Here the batmen, grooms, and signallers from regimental headquarters under Lieutenant G. T. Pledger,⁵ the adjutant, and Lieutenant H. S. Wright,⁶ the acting signal officer, were the only troops between the Germans and the British batteries a few hundred yards behind. One post was lost; Bourne, who was personally directing the fight, then withdrew both parties to a prepared trench about 150 yards behind the crest. Here, as the enemy showed on the skyline, they had a good target, and for more than an hour arrested the advance. Cox, at brigade headquarters south of the Auja, had been aroused by the fire at the beginning of the attack, and at once advised Chaytor, whose headquarters were north of Jericho. Grant was ordered to hold his brigade ready, and to send at once a regiment to report to Cox.

As soon as the position was clear, and Cox was aware that the Germans were advancing on Abu Tellul with the light horse posts still standing in their rear, he acted with characteristic decision. "Get to them, Granny," was his brief and comprehensive order to Granville. Already in the darkness Granville's squadrons along the wady were waiting beside their horses, impatient for the word to advance. Rugged as was the country to be covered, it was known in minute detail by every trooper in the regiment; every man knew, too, how critical must be the situation with his friends of the 2nd and 3rd Regiments. At 3.40 a.m. one squadron

⁵ Lieut. G. T. Pledger, M.C. 2nd L.H. Regt. Farmer; b. Peterborough, Northamptonshire, Eng., 24 Apr., 1890.

⁶ Lieut. H. S. Wright, 2nd L.H. Regt. Coachbuilder, b. Hemmant, Q'land, 20 Apr., 1893.

was ordered to report to Bourne on Abu Tellul, and four machine-guns, which had been held in reserve, were soon afterwards ordered forward, two to each end of the ridge. Shortly before 4 a.m., when it had become plain that the main blow was falling on the right sector of Tellul, Granville sent a second squadron to join the first, and at the same time Bell, of the 3rd Regiment, was ordered to push his reserve squadron in the same direction. The ridge covered the approach of Granville's men, and Major Weir, who was leading the two squadrons, joined Bourne soon after sunrise. If the hard-pressed posts were to be saved, the counter-stroke must be instant. Covering fire was ordered from the post further left, occupied by the men of the 3rd, under Lieutenant McDonald, and from two machine-guns under Lieutenant H. Hackney.⁷ Weir's men, who had dismounted some time before, were now ready with fixed bayonets for the charge. With an eager shout the light horsemen topped the crest, and followed their leaders in a rushing charge upon the Germans. Surprised and caught scattered in the open, the enemy offered but slight resistance, broke, and fled down into the valley. As they ran, they came nearer the deadly fire of the defenders of Vyse and Musallabeh, and were flanked on their left from View and Vaux. Trapped and distracted, and with all order gone, they "ran about (in a light horseman's words) like a lot of mad rabbits."

This dramatic stroke completely cleared Abu Tellul. But the enemy was still strong on The Bluff, where Henderson's battered men were fighting desperately, and was also making further attempts against View and Vaux on the west. Granville with his reserve squadron was ordered to move along the edge of the valley and clear The Bluff from the east, but this advance was broken up by very accurate enemy shell-fire. It was then decided that Weir should assail The Bluff with the bayonet; and, with good covering fire from the Notts Battery and "B" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company, the light horsemen, advancing with confidence and dash about 8 a.m., speedily cleared the position and captured upwards of 100 prisoners. Soon afterwards the enemy surrounding View

⁷ Lieut.-Col. H. Hackney, M.C.; 1st Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Mounted constable, of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Widnes, Lancs., Eng., 7 Oct., 1880.

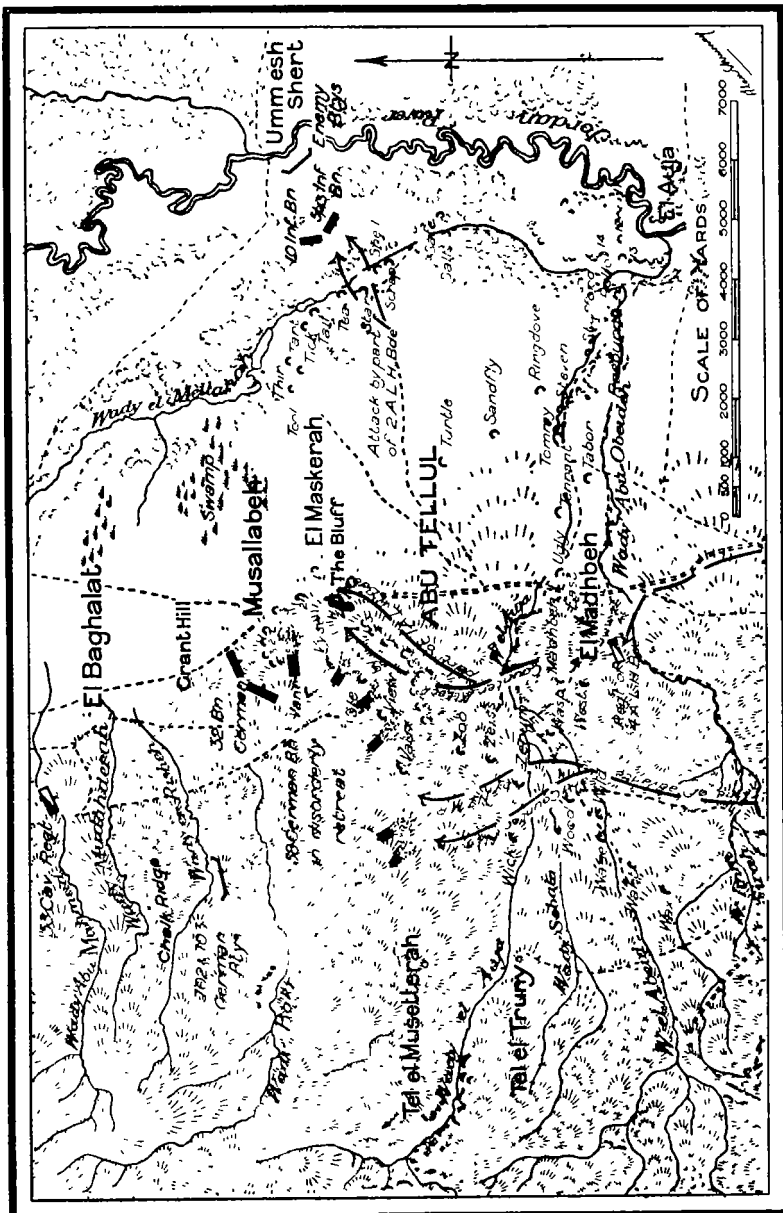
withdrew, leaving twenty-two prisoners and many dead and wounded on the ground; a squadron of the Wellingtons, advancing from Zeiss, cleared away the Germans who had been threatening Vaux, and by 9 a.m. all the hostile force inside the Australian posts had been accounted for, and the original line restored. One hundred and five enemy dead and forty-five wounded were found inside the light horse posts; the prisoners numbered 425, of whom 358 were Germans, the dead and wounded being in proportion. In addition, the Australians captured four machine-guns (some of which were afterwards used against the enemy on The Bluff), thirty-seven light machine-guns, and a large number of rifles. The light horse casualties were two officers (including Lieutenant King) and twenty-one other ranks killed, and seven officers and thirty-nine other ranks wounded. The ammunition used by the brigade was: rifle 19,000 rounds, Hotchkiss 20,000, machine-gun 30,000.

This exciting little fight had some features which gave it an interest far beyond the destruction of a few hundred enemy troops. It was the last deliberate offensive attempted against the British in Palestine; and it was the only occasion in the campaign in which German infantry were used as storm-troops. It had, therefore, significant effects upon the two rival armies. All through the campaign officers going to Palestine from France were disposed to belittle the fighting qualities of the Turks, and to declare that the British in the Holy Land were very fortunate not to be opposed to Germans. The fact that a force of German infantry about a thousand strong had been so decisively beaten by a brigade of light horsemen in position was not in itself remarkable. But the Australians were none the less elated at the result. They found on this day, as they had discovered before the attack was made, that the German, although incomparably superior to the Turk as an offensive fighter, was very inferior as a rifle shot to his despised ally. The constant sniping duels between the light horse and the Turks were evenly matched affairs, in which excessive keenness and exposure on either side always ended in disaster. But Australians sniping Germans quickly learned that they could move with relative safety into the open, and rely upon their quicker and straighter work to beat the enemy.

Another point arising out of the attack, of considerable interest and value to the British, was the additional evidence it provided of the discord in the enemy's camps. The captured German officers complained bitterly that in the assault they had been betrayed by the Turks, who were to have attacked simultaneously on the Mellahah front and against the bridge-heads east of Jordan. They spoke very frankly and in terms of disgust of their allies, and made no attempt to conceal their chagrin at the result of their first essay in Palestine. Moreover, the Australians were flattered by the statements of both German and Turkish officers that they had been assured by their German Intelligence that the light horsemen and New Zealanders were resting at Bethlehem, while the position which they were to attack was held by Indians and a few British yeomanry.

As the prisoners were marched back towards Jericho, their appearance awakened an extraordinary interest in all the British troops; when they reached Jerusalem, the curiosity and ill-concealed delight of the great majority of the populace was boundless. The news of the reverse, with its peculiar racial significance, travelled quickly on both sides of the Jordan, and had a moral effect very damaging to the enemy. Among all Arabs and the population generally from Jerusalem and Maan to Aleppo, the complete destruction of this German force—greatly exaggerated in the telling—did more to shake Turco-German prestige than anything which had happened since the capture of Jerusalem.

The Germans had been admirably equipped, except that their only headcover in that destructive sunshine was the little round cap they had worn in the early fighting in France. In light machine-guns they were relatively stronger than the Australians, and, far removed as they were from the German bases, their campaigning gear as a whole belied the current belief that the enemy was short of army supplies. The day of engagement was one of fierce heat. By 7 a.m. the shade temperature was above 100 degrees; later in the morning the thermometer in the operating tent of the 1st Light Horse Brigade Field Ambulance stood at 120 degrees. The Germans had drunk their scanty supplies of water early in the morning, and consequently suffered extremely from thirst; when they



THE COUNTER-ATTACK AT ABU TELLUL, 14TH JULY, 1918.

were rushed with the bayonet on The Bluff, they were rapidly approaching a stage of collapse. Their initial attack was marked by perfect discipline and much vigour; but from the moment they were caught on their right flank by the garrisons of Vaux and View, and turned east along the valley where they were assailed at close range from View and Musallabeh, their position was hopeless. Their continued effort against Abu Tellul was, in the circumstances, a fine one, but with direct fire on their backs as they climbed the ridge their assault was piecemeal and feeble.

To Granville's two squadrons all credit is due for their slashing work with the bayonet, which brought the fight to a close. But even without that advance the enemy was already defeated, and must, unless speedily and heavily reinforced, have been compelled to retire or surrender. The light horse position was saved at the outset by the steadiness and terribly accurate fire-practice of the men in the posts from Vaux to Musallabeh, and by the heroic resistance in all the surrounded posts, especially at the positions on The Bluff and Abu Tellul held by King and Henderson. As at the Ghoraniye bridgehead in April, Cox disclosed a fine sense of the situation; Bourne's forward leadership was cool and admirable, and the work of his 2nd Regiment of Queenslanders, on whom fell the brunt of the resistance, was never excelled in the career of the light horse.

With but occasional exceptions, this long Palestine struggle was elevated by clean and chivalrous fighting and by generous and sympathetic treatment of prisoners. Australians who fell into Turkish hands were, it is true, subjected to extreme hardship and at times ill-usage. Yet such is the inevitable penalty of a war against a half-civilised foe. The Turks treated the British prisoners from Palestine as they treated their own rank and file, no better and no worse; and men of Western origin would sicken and die under conditions in which the hardy and stolid Ottoman flourished. The Germans captured at Abu Tellul were handled with sympathy and courtesy by the light horsemen. Water-bottles were everywhere shared with the parched prisoners; and the Germans, as they left the headquarters of Anzac Mounted Division in the evening to proceed by motor-lorry to Jerusalem, expressed their gratitude in rousing cheers for their captors.

Statements by prisoners, which were confirmed by the papers captured later in the year at Nazareth, showed that the attack at Abu Tellul was intended as the preliminary blow of a scheme designed by the enemy to overwhelm Chauvel's entire force in the valley. The main assault, delivered by the 24th Turkish Division (including two German battalions), was to penetrate the Auja defences in the foot-hills, and seize Jericho and the roads to Jerusalem. As soon as Abu Tellul was captured, another division, the 53rd, was to drive through by the plain between Musallabeh and the Jordan, and take in rear the bridgeheads at the Auja crossing and Ghoraniye. At the same time a containing attack, supported by a heavy bombardment, was to be made against the bridgeheads from the east of the river. If the Germans had been successful against Cox in the early morning, the Turks behind would probably have advanced according to plan; but, when the spearhead force was destroyed, the whole offensive, except for isolated demonstrations, was abandoned. The Turks had commonly complained that the German assistance on the front was, except for machine-gunners, limited to staff work and supplies, while they were left to face the British bullets. So strong was the feeling in 1918 that the Turks, learning that at last some German infantry was to do some fighting, may quite possibly have given ready promises about co-operation, and then deliberately held back and allowed their allies to suffer.

Soon after 5 a.m., while the fight was proceeding at Abu Tellul, a German infantry force appeared on some high broken ground about 1,000 yards east of "Salt" and "Star" Posts on the Mellahah. Vigorous shelling quickly compelled the enemy to take cover; and, although his batteries freely bombarded Ryrie's positions, the infantry showed no disposition to engage at close quarters. Lieutenant J. D. Macansh^a of the 5th Regiment was then sent out with fourteen men to test their strength. Creeping forward, the light horsemen approached within twenty yards of the enemy—who numbered from 150 to 200—before they were discovered. Despite their inferiority in numbers, the Australians then opened fire with

^a Lieut J. D. Macansh, M.C. 5th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; b. Warwick, Q'land, 11 Oct., 1883. Died, 21 Feb., 1930.

their rifles and, before the Germans recovered from their surprise and confusion, had seized fifteen prisoners and commenced their withdrawal. The Germans followed closely, throwing bombs from a distance of only a few yards, and calling upon the Australians to surrender. Macansh, however, returned with his prisoners, with only one of his own men wounded.

Fire from the "Star," "Shell," and "Scrap" Posts was then concentrated on the enemy force, and its retirement prevented, while "A" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company, locating two advanced machine-guns, killed the crew of one and forced the other to withdraw. Despite the terrific heat, the keenness of the Queenslanders when they learned that they were opposed by Germans was boundless; and Captain Boyd, who commanded the squadron, which was scattered over the three posts, had difficulty in keeping his men within their defences. At about 8 a.m. Macansh again went out, accompanied by Lieutenant B. R. Byrnes⁹ and twenty men, and his adventure provides an admirable example of light horse craft, daring, and striking power. Moving cautiously through the mud-hills, he again got within bombing distance of the Germans before his men were discovered. Working round the enemy, the handful of Australians dashed in with bombs and bayonets, and in a few minutes had killed twenty-five Germans, wounded thirty, and taken thirty prisoners. The remainder fled panic-stricken towards their wire entanglements a thousand yards away, the light horsemen shooting them as they ran. The Queenslanders had an officer and two troopers slightly wounded. "The enterprise throughout," wrote Colonel Cameron, with proper pride in his men, "was a fine example of able and gallant leadership, inspiring men to any undertaking, however hazardous."

During the day a force of the enemy about 2,000 strong moved towards the Umm esh Shert crossing on the east of the Jordan, but did not attack. A similar force was seen in the open about Shunet Nimrin, and his artillery was very active. Further south, on the scrubby plain country between Ghoraniye and the Dead Sea, a body of Turkish infantry

⁹ Lieut. B. R. Byrnes, M.C., 5th L.H. Regt. Saw-miller; of Murwillumbah, Tweed District, N.S.W.; b. Ballina, Richmond River, N.S.W., 17 July, 1889.

marched towards the El Henu Ford, and gave some regiments of Indian cavalry an opportunity for a brilliant display with the lance. The Jodhpurs and the Mysorees were hurried across the Jordan by small swing-bridges at El Henu and Makhadet Hajla, while the Sherwood Rangers and the Poona Horse moved out from Ghoraniye bridgehead. Screened by the scrub, the Jodhpurs and Mysorees were galloping down on the Turks before they were observed. The Mysorees assailed them in front, while the Jodhpurs crashed into their flank. About ninety Turks were taken on the lances; another ninety were made prisoner, and the trophies included four machine-guns. This was the first charge made in Palestine by the Indian cavalry, and it had a useful effect upon the spirits of Allenby's new horsemen.

A steady increase in enemy artillery activity along the Jordan during the summer served to confirm the belief that the Turks feared another British effort to break east and north from the valley. Immediately following the enemy failure on the 14th, there was heavy shelling of the light horse posts, horse-lines, and watering places. As a rule the horses concealed along the wadys in the foot-hills escaped lightly, but the dense clouds of dust caused by movement to water seldom failed to draw gun-fire, and losses were frequent. On July 16th the horse-lines of Granville's regiment came under direct observation of enemy artillery firing from the east of Jordan; Captain E. C. Battye¹⁰ and a trooper were killed, and Lieutenant D. M. M. O'Connor¹¹ and a few others were wounded, while endeavouring to remove the horses. In a few minutes fifty-eight animals were killed and twenty-seven wounded—a severe loss to the regiment.

The heat in the valley had gathered in intensity during June and July, while each day the dust grew deeper and finer, and the stagnant air heavier and less life-giving. Wastage from sickness and sheer exhaustion became more pronounced, it being noticed that the older men offered the stoutest resistance to the distressing conditions. Shell-fire and snipers caused casualties which were, if not heavy, a steady drain on

¹⁰ Capt E C Battye, 1st L.H. Regt. Grazier, of Scone, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, Sydney, N.S.W., 21 Dec., 1886. Killed in action, 16 July, 1918

¹¹ Lieut D. M. M. O'Connor, 1st L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Scone, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 10 May, 1892.

the Australian force, and when men were invalided, the shortage of reinforcements necessitated bringing them back to the valley before their recovery was complete. A few days after the fight at Abu Tellul, Cox's brigade was withdrawn to the hills, and a little later, to the delight of the men, was marched right down to the Jewish settlement of Wady Hanein, where from July 26th to August 16th they enjoyed the pleasant summer climate of the Philistine plain, and the fruit and wine and simple civilisation of the Jews. The New Zealanders and Ryrie's brigade left the valley soon afterwards, and went into camp near Bethlehem, where Chaytor had his headquarters in the Carmelite monastery.

It was then the turn of the Australian Mounted Division and the Indians to swelter on the Jordan. But, severe as the ordeal had been, it had, thanks to the work of the medical service, imposed fewer losses than had been feared at the outset; by the Australians, who had been through the dust and heat of southern Palestine and the blistering sands of Sinai, it was borne with amazing cheerfulness. Notwithstanding the extreme heat, the abnormal air-pressure, the dust, mosquitoes, flies, and other vicious pests, the prevalent note in the ranks was far from an unhappy one. As midsummer passed, although the troops knew that they had still two months of extreme heat and discomfort to endure, men's thoughts turned to the renewed offensive which, they instinctively knew, must come with the autumn. Their faith in the High Command had been a little shaken by the two failures east of Jordan, but those misadventures were now almost forgotten. There never was a time in the campaign when all ranks were so confident of individual and collective superiority over the foe as they were in this summer of 1918. And their faith in their Commander-in-Chief was absolute. Soon after the middle of August Chaytor was back in the Jordan valley with the Anzac Mounted Division, where he relieved Hodgson's brigades on the northern sector.

Already the decision had been taken to arm the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Light Horse Brigades with swords. Grant with the 4th Brigade was on his way to a camp in the olive-groves west of Ludd, where the men were to be trained. Divisional commanders and brigadiers had been consulted about the use

of the sword. In Chaytor's command the proposal was not favoured, and the troops were left to conclude the campaign with their rifles. But both Grant and Wilson were keen to possess the cavalry weapon. Already their brigades had owing to the enthusiasm of Lieutenant-Colonel R. H. Osborne¹²—an Australian, but a professional Imperial soldier, who was chief staff officer to Hodgson's division—been freely exercised in the use on horseback of the detached bayonet as a short sword, and had handled it effectively in the dash of the 8th Regiment into Es Salt. Officers and men entered with great zest into their sword exercises. Sportsmen all, they forgot their weariness as they played about with the new weapon. Their actual training did not exceed a few hours; but day and night they practised among themselves, until in two or three weeks they reached a degree of efficiency which vastly astonished the few British regular non-commissioned officers in charge of their instruction. It was jestingly said that, when they moved from Ludd, there was not a wild dog left alive within several miles of their camp. The secret of their success was, of course, their exceptional skill in the saddle and the tractability of their seasoned horses. The sword, even at the outset, was no encumbrance to them, and at that stage in the war the horses would have showed little concern if a machine-gun had been operated from their backs.

¹² Col. R. H. Osborne, D.S.O., M.C., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; of Bangaroo, Canowindra, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, N.S.W., 30 June, 1883.

CHAPTER XL

ALLENBY'S GREAT SCHEME

LATE in August, Allenby, after many conferences with his corps commanders, unfolded the scheme which he confidently believed would destroy the three Turkish armies opposed to him, and bring the campaign to a decisive close. The developments since June had justified his resolute facing of the position when his force had been so sorely reduced by the loss of his white divisions and the substitution of Indians. Rigorous training, successful raiding, and the deft intermingling of the new battalions with British veterans, who through hard fighting knew themselves superior to the Turk, had in a few weeks worked an impressive change in the Indian reinforcements. Always keen, and personally brave beyond question, they were now fair battle-troops; adequately equipped and rationed, they were probably superior, man for man, to the experienced but disheartened and ill-used Turks opposed to them. And, if the Indian infantry was promising, the cavalry had in their work in the Jordan valley exceeded all anticipation. While most of the British infantry officers with the Indians, having been recruited since the beginning of the war, were handicapped by an imperfect knowledge of Hindustani, and had not that intimate sense of the Eastern psychology which is essential to successful leaders of Indian troops, the cavalry officers were in the main regulars of long training and association with their regiments. The whole force, including the Australians and New Zealanders, discussed with a significant smile the day when the Indians on their walers would pour through a breach in the enemy's line and gallop down upon a disorganised army.

Allenby was not troubled about the quality of the British infantry which were left him. They had missed the ordeal of the Jordan summer, and, although there had been some malaria on the Sharon sector, most of the battalions had spent the hot months on the high country, and were now in prime battle-condition. The airmen, daily growing bolder as their superiority became clear, by August completely dominated the German pilots, ranged incessantly over the enemy's territory, and by their aggression and a thorough

system of defensive patrols kept the British lines and rear almost entirely free from aerial observation. Allenby was happy about his communications also. The alternative line was complete to Junction Station; additional construction was proceeding apace in the long fine days, and supplies were being built up, as they had been in the previous year south of Gaza, in readiness for an advance up the plain of Sharon. Great fleets of motor-lorries thronged the dumps and the dusty roads; a few thousand transport-camels had been sent to the assistance of the Sherifian Army, but Allenby had at this time 25,700 with his troops, in addition to 8,000 donkeys. The hard-working, singing Egyptians of the Labour Corps now numbered nearly 135,000.

Of the British force the only troops not in true battle-condition were the Australians and New Zealanders. Physically the two divisions, with the exception of Onslow's new brigade, were but gaunt ghosts of the splendid bodies which had moved across the Jordan in the spring. The men were, in light horse language, "as poor as crows," and their horses, if still strong, had picked up much dust in Jordan valley, and were in low condition. The long, spare type of young manhood which characterises the Australian countryside was to be seen in every saddle. The summer in the valley had not only greatly reduced the men in weight, but had made of them in reality a sick and exhausted force. Heat and dust, bad food, and enforced sleeplessness would alone have destroyed men of a less virile and cheerful race; but besides enduring these conditions, they were seriously afflicted with more or less active disease. The great majority had suffered from successive attacks of malaria and lesser recurrent fevers, and all from severe stomach troubles.

Since the war there has appeared in Australia some criticism of the extent to which the light horsemen were employed in the deadly valley, and it has been pointed out that Allenby, by keeping a mounted force on the Jordan, made it necessary to employ far more transport than would have been needed for infantry, while the care of the horses kept in the valley thousands of men who were not actually engaged in the firing line. But the policy of the Commander-in-Chief was sound. The valley had to be held at all costs, and with as

few troops as possible. The tactical nature of the line demanded that, unless a large force was to be used, it must be held by mobile mounted men. Hence the employment of the horsemen. Another important consideration was that the mounted divisions must necessarily hold some part of the long front, and the Jordan valley was the only sector in which a good supply of water for the horses was to be found close to the firing line. The selection of the Australians and New Zealanders was in some measure a selection based upon relative trustworthiness; but it was also a matter of necessity, since the withdrawal of the Yeomanry Division left the mounted work for a time to Chaytor's and Hodgson's forces. As the Indians, however, became available late in the summer, they were freely used along the Jordan, although, their term being short, they came out of that experience without serious disablement. But Chauvel and Allenby, if they were depressed at the appearance of the two veteran Dominion divisions, had no misgivings as to their performance, even in the immediate future. Since the day they had crossed the Canal into Sinai, they had, under every sort of condition from the heat of the desert to the wintry sleet before Amman, fought with light hearts and terrible striking power; and the commanders were confident that, sick as they were, they would fight with the same spirit and effect until the Turks were finally smashed.

In August, therefore, Allenby was on the whole satisfied with the condition of his force; he was also encouraged to an offensive by the state of the enemy. Since the War Office, early in January, had ventured the opinion that the British in Palestine might be opposed by from 60,000 to 70,000 front-line troops, there had been portentous happenings on the decisive field in France. The Germans, in a desperate throw for a decision, had subordinated the interests of all the subsidiary fronts to serve their titanic effort in the West; and the Turkish armies in Palestine, dependent now for fighting supplies and inspiration upon Berlin, withered as the support weakened. The initial German triumphs of March and April were followed by inactivity as Foch built up the Allied Armies for his triumphant counter-strokes; and the enemy in Palestine, no longer fed by daily bulletins of victory,

denied sorely-needed reinforcements, and acutely short of rations, although still strong in munitions, grew each week more dispirited and less effective.

Liman von Sanders was fully aware of the wretched state of his army. He was in no doubt as to Allenby's intention to attack, and he had little faith in the capacity of his own weak and dejected divisions. Earlier in the summer he had considered a withdrawal to the shorter line from Haifa by the Esdraelon plain to the Yarmuk Gorge, east of the Jordan, just south of the Sea of Galilee. But this would have entailed the loss of all the Hejaz railway south of Deraa, and apart from that the condition of his troops made a retreat hazardous. He therefore resolved to stand on his ground.

The enemy was sorely handicapped by his single narrow-gauge railway line from Rayak, and by his limited and inferior road and field transport. The broad-gauge tunnels through the Taurus were not completed until October, and until the end of the campaign the service was therefore broken and slow. From Constantinople to Aleppo his railway was loaded up with supplies not only for Palestine and the Hejaz, but also for the Baghdad campaign. From Aleppo to Deraa the line was responsible for both Palestine and the Hejaz. His motor-transport, which was in the capable hands of the Germans, was limited, and his horse- and bullock-transport was primitive and slow. Even when the front was quiet, he was barely able to supply the frugal needs of his hardy troops; when the line was active and it was necessary to move forces rapidly, the situation became chaotic. Troops were marched to excess when they should have been carried, and the dislocation at once reduced the already slender supply of rations.

Allenby therefore enjoyed a marked advantage in the quality and spirit of his troops, in communications and supplies, and, thanks to his air service and the Turkish deserters, in knowledge of the enemy's dispositions, movement, and intentions. But still more important and impressive was his superiority in numbers. At the beginning of September he had four mounted divisions, of which nine brigades were completely armed as cavalry, seven divisions and a brigade of infantry, four unallotted battalions of infantry, and the

French detachment, which was now increased to an infantry brigade. This gave him a total strength for the fighting line of some 12,000 sabres, 57,000 infantry, and 540 guns.

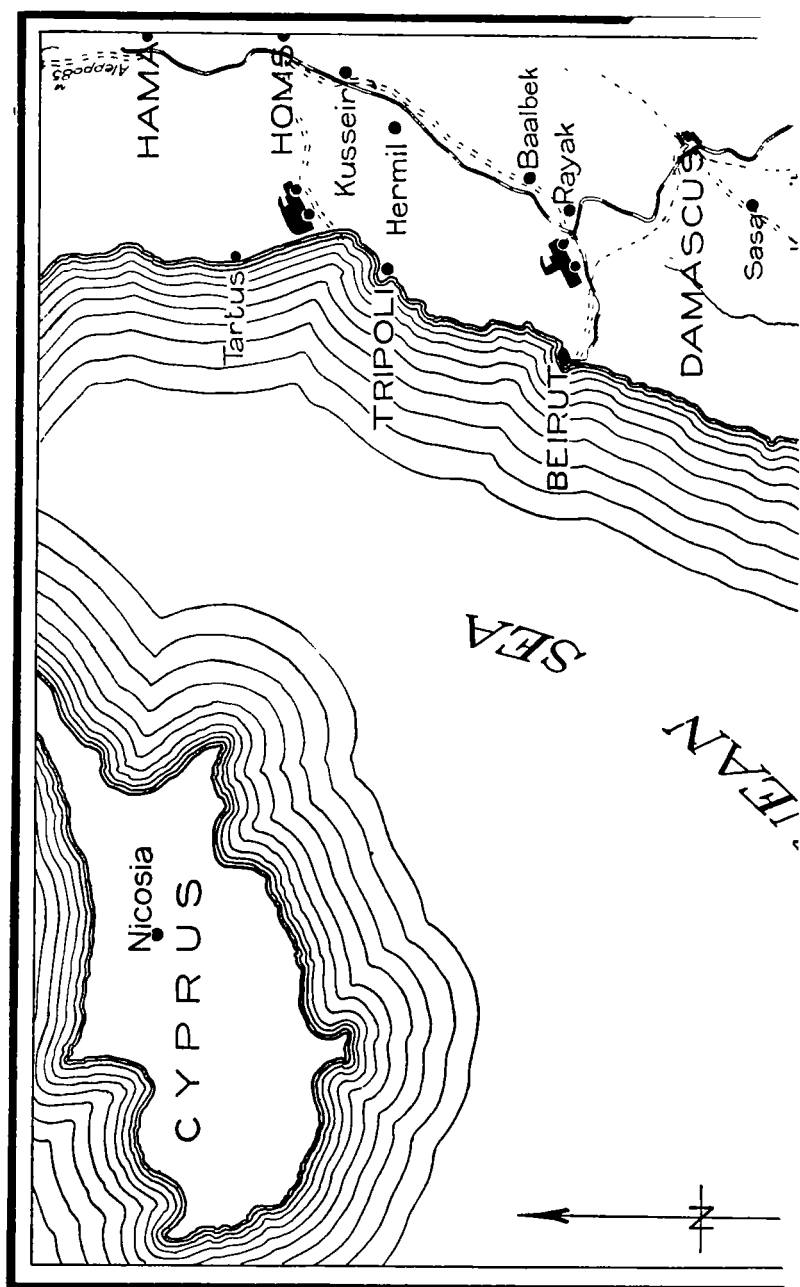
The fighting strength of the enemy was estimated by Allenby to be about 23,000 rifles, 3,000 sabres, and 340 guns. Of these the Fourth Turkish Army (6,000 rifles, 2,000 cavalry, and 74 guns) was based on Es Salt, east of Jordan, and was opposed to Chauvel's troops in the valley. The Seventh Army (7,000 rifles, detachments of cavalry, and 111 guns) was opposed to the XX British Corps on a front of twenty miles astride the Nablus road; and the Eighth Army (10,000 rifles, detachments of cavalry, and 157 guns) carried the line westward to the Mediterranean. A further force of some 6,000 rifles and thirty guns was operating at Maan and along the Hejaz railway to the north. The enemy was extremely weak in general reserves, having only about 3,000 rifles with thirty guns scattered between Tiberias, Nazareth, and Haifa. Inferior in all arms, he was especially weak in cavalry. His 3,000 mounted men of the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division, wretchedly horsed and of poor fighting quality, would have been confidently faced at any time by a single light horse brigade. This estimate of the enemy's force in the late summer of 1918 was not borne out in the subsequent advance, when no less than 75,000 prisoners were captured by the British. It is interesting to notice, however, that Liman von Sanders, in his book upon his service with the Turks during the war, states that on September 14th his Palestine army was made up of only ten Turkish divisions of an average strength of 1,300 rifles each, and 1,200 cavalry, together with six weak German battalions and the technical services. The striking discrepancy cannot yet be satisfactorily explained; but the capture of 75,000 prisoners, of whom the majority were combatants, is beyond question. Further, it should be noted that Allenby's fighting leaders in Palestine were unanimous in their belief that British Intelligence throughout the campaign underestimated the numbers of the enemy; and they expressed astonishment when the Commander-in-Chief, in his despatch to the War Office, accepted 23,000 rifles as the strength of the Turks in the summer of 1918.

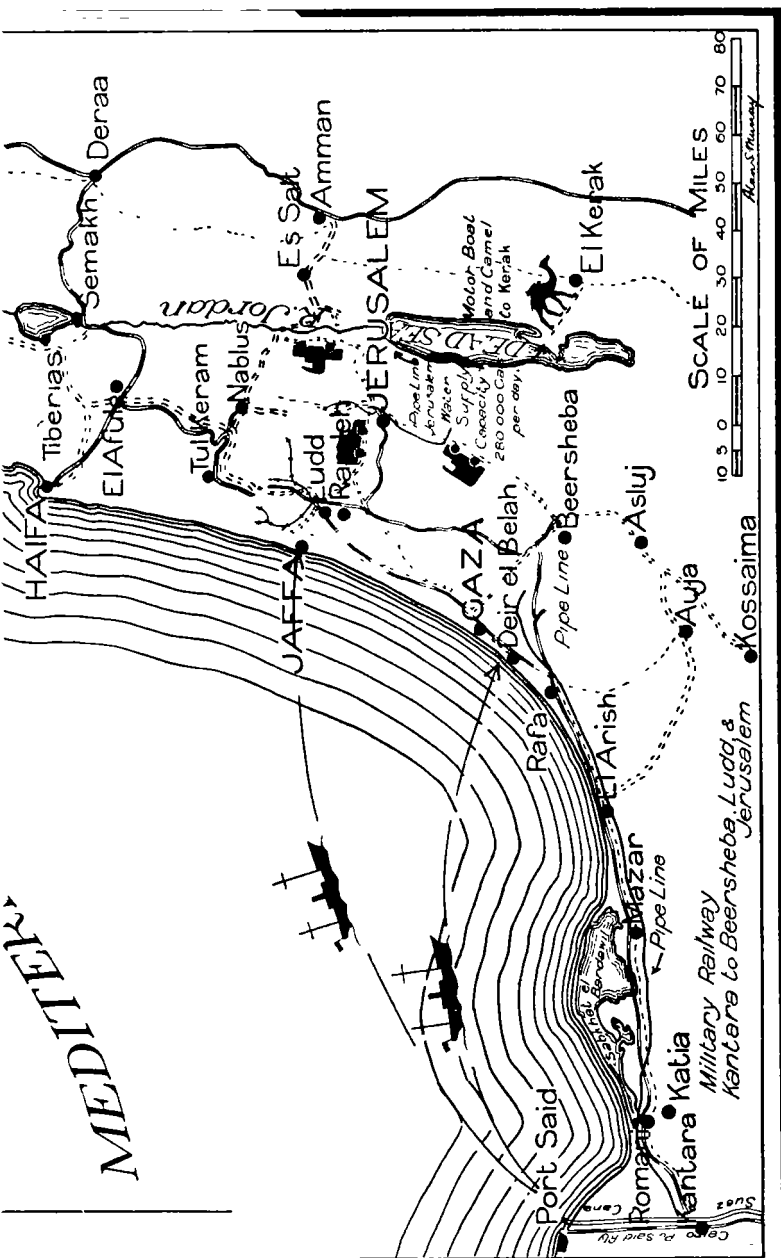
In drawing up his plan of operations, Allenby's dominant problem was how to use effectively the great mounted force under Chauvel. One day's hard ride, following a successful break on either the east or west, would suffice to sever the communications of the two Turkish armies west of the Jordan, while a successful blow at Deraa would also isolate the Fourth Army and the Turks opposed to the Arabs. The point for decision was whether (1) to attempt again to break through on the east by the Jordan valley, clear Gilead in co-operation with the Arabs, cut the Turkish communications where the railway crossed the river north of Beisan, and move direct on Deraa; or (2) to smash through on the plain of Sharon, close to the sea, and then, riding hard up the plain, cross the saddle which leads north-west from Samaria to Mount Carmel, and swing east along the level Esdraelon plain between Galilee and Samaria to the Jordan at Beisan. This movement would carry the mounted men across the railway communications of the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies, and leave them in a perilous position upon Samaria.

Allenby was naturally tempted to join forces with the Arabs at the outset of the operations; with resolute Arab co-operation, the destruction of the Fourth Army and the advance to Beisan and Deraa would have been swift and assured. But neither he nor his corps commanders were disposed to gamble again on the good faith and fighting capacity of the tribesmen. And, unless the operation east of Jordan went through with a rush, it might be again frustrated by the despatch of Turkish reinforcements across the river at Jisr ed Damieh. He therefore turned his attention to Sharon; and in this he was encouraged by the heavy concentration and enemy vigilance east of Jordan, which had been brought about by the two raids earlier in the year.

The situation on the uplands of Samaria and the plain of Sharon was a very seductive one to a forceful leader possessed of a huge force of cavalry. Armies marching north have a choice of three routes from Sharon to the Esdraelon plain. Through a low chain of hills which link Samaria up with Mount Carmel there are two passes, Mus Mus towards the eastern end, and Abu Shushe some miles

MAP





BRITISH AND TURKISH LINES OF COMMUNICATION, SUMMER OF 1918.

nearer Carmel; while the sheer cliff-face of Carmel, terminating abruptly within a few hundred yards of the Mediterranean, leaves room for a road which leads to Haifa. This latter route, however, is too closely confined and easily guarded to make it attractive to leaders, and armies have almost invariably chosen one of the two passes. Napoleon in his march northwards traversed the passes further east; but on the return, after his failure at Acre, he marched his sick and straggling army by the track along the beach.

Thus the heights of Samaria, which were the stronghold of the Turks in western Palestine at the beginning of September, 1918, are an elevated, rugged region flanked on the east by the Jordan valley, on the north by the Esdraelon plain, and on the west by the plain of Sharon. British and Indian infantry opposed the enemy strongly from the south. The low ground on the other three sides offered rapid and easy movement to mounted troops. The Eighth Turkish Army, with headquarters at Tul Keram on the edge of Sharon, and the Seventh Army, with headquarters at Nablus, were disposed over a line of forty-five miles from the sea to the Jordan, on a depth of about fourteen miles, with their rear roughly bounded by the line Jisr ed Damieh-Nablus-Tul Keram to the coast. The reserves about the north of the Esdraelon plain did not, as we have seen, exceed 3,000, and were of little consequence. From the rear of the enemy's line to the Esdraelon plain at El Afule in the centre, and to Beisan on the river, at which places his communications converged, the distance was about twenty-five miles. Consequently, if his line could be broken on Sharon and the British cavalry poured through, both Beisan and El Afule could be seized within twenty-four hours or a little more, and the British cavalry would then be twenty-five miles behind any Turkish troops which could seriously molest them. Moreover, Allenby was confident that an infantry drive at the line on the plain of Sharon and in the foot-hills would, while creating a gap for the cavalry, at the same time fling the enemy back in confusion, while upon Samaria the XX Corps would be strong enough also to advance. He had no fear that the Turks would be able simultaneously to resist the infantry, and to detach sufficient troops to drive off the

Indians and Australians astride their communications on the Esdraelon plain, in time to save the two armies from isolation and destruction.

Across the plain of Sharon the Turks had two systems of defences. Their front line, made up of continuous fire-trenches, followed the crest of a sand-ridge extending for eight miles from Bir Adas to the sea; it had a depth of about 3,000 yards. Nearly two miles to the rear of this was a reserve line, running from the village of Et Tireh to the mouth of the Nahr Falik. This system, as it approached the Mediterranean, ran through marshy ground difficult of approach, and was only lightly held. Between the marshes and the coast, however, there was a narrow passage which offered firm ground for the cavalry. The enemy's railway came down as far as Jiljulieh, the ancient Gilgal, and about that village, as well as at Kalkilieh a few miles further north, was covered by strong defences. The British approach lay across open flats which, as they were rankly overgrown with weeds and neglected crops now dry in the summer sun, offered some cover to infantry. From his battery positions in the foot-hills the enemy had excellent observation, and was able to direct his fire very exactly on the right sector of his defences on the plain.

Having resolved to attack by Sharon, Allenby proceeded with the concentration of his striking force. His aim was to assail the sector with the full strength of Bulfin's XXI Corps—the 3rd (Lahore), 7th (Meerut), 54th, and 75th Infantry Divisions—supplemented by the 60th Division from the XX Corps, the French detachment, and the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade under Onslow. Bulfin's corps artillery was to be backed by two brigades of Royal Horse Artillery and eighteen siege batteries. When the infantry attacked, Chauvel, with the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions under Barrow and Macandrew and the Australian Mounted Division under Hodgson, must be ready in their immediate rear. All this concentration must be made without the knowledge of the enemy. Allenby recognised that, marked as his superiority was in numbers, guns, and fighting quality, if the Turks anticipated his blow and concentrated against him, the advance, even if not absolutely checked, might be sufficiently retarded

to prevent that swift ride of the cavalry for Esdraelon on which the success of the whole operation depended.

Macandrew's 5th Cavalry Division and the XXI Corps were already in the western area; to complete the concentration, Chauvel had to move from the Jordan side with Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters and Barrow's and Hodgson's divisions; the 60th Division had also a considerable distance to march, and many batteries had to be transferred to the Sharon sector from the Jordan valley and from the front of Chetwode's corps on the hills. This Palestine front was not a continuous line of impassable fortifications, like the trench systems in France. Over long distances it was only a chain of posts, and on the eastern side had many wide gaps easily negotiated in the darkness by spies of both armies. The alliance with the loosely organised Arabs—many of whom were neutral and not a few friendly to the Turks—and the generous British treatment of the natives of western Palestine, made the task of enemy agents an easy one. Concealment of the movement of large bodies of troops was therefore extremely difficult. On moonlight nights marching columns raised clouds of dust which could be seen for miles. All the experience of the British leaders went to show that news crossed and recrossed the lines with wonderful rapidity.

Not content, therefore, with taking all conceivable measures to move troops secretly, the Commander-in-Chief proceeded at the same time to mislead the enemy as he had done in the previous year at Gaza. Some of the devices employed seemed very obvious to the amused British troops, but collectively they were completely successful in baffling and deceiving the enemy. It was above all desirable to encourage the German and Turkish belief that Allenby would again attempt to break out from the Jordan valley on the east. And it was now that the two great failures of the spring on Gilead bore such rich fruit. Anticipating attack in the east, the enemy was quick to observe signs which strengthened his preconception. When Fast's Hotel at Jerusalem (a German house before the war, which had been taken over by the British Canteens Board and conducted as a hotel for officers), was suddenly emptied of its lodgers, sentry-boxes placed at the doors, and the rumour started in the bazaars that the building was at once to become

the Commander-in-Chief's Advanced-Headquarters, the enemy no doubt at once foresaw operations along the Nablus road or in the valley. All Jerusalem buzzed with the news, and its leakage to the enemy was a matter of hours. At the same time, while Chauvel was packing up at Talat ed Dumm, and the two mounted divisions were crossing Judæa towards Sharon by night marches, a distant observer of the Jordan valley might have been excused if he believed the force there was being increased rather than reduced. Allenby had decided temporarily to take risks on the Jordan. Chaytor was to be left in the valley with his sick and tired Anzac Mounted Division, supported by a strange composite body of infantry made up of two battalions of British West Indians, two battalions of Jews who had been recruited mainly in England but to some extent in other countries and in Palestine itself, and the 20th Indian (Imperial Service) Infantry Brigade consisting of troops of the native Indian States trained and led by a small cadre of British officers. Of "Chaytor's Force," as the command was known, the New Zealanders and light horse, though reduced, were still absolutely dependable, and the Indians were fair; but the West Indians and the Jews were an unknown quantity as fighters, and only sheer necessity prompted their employment at a critical hour. But in Chaytor they had a leader of long experience and exceptional capacity, and, if they were few in numbers and curiously mixed in race and religion, they raised much dust and made a brave appearance in the eyes of the enemy.

As the mounted troops for Sharon were withdrawn from the valley, new and enlarged camps arose on the reserve areas; 15,000 dummy horses, built of canvas, stood in very realistic fashion, if somewhat quietly, on the lines; camp fires burned brightly at night; sleighs drawn by mules jogged about the sea of dust in the daytime, making observation difficult and suggesting vast energy; the British West Indians were moved from place to place; and, as the Jewish battalions marched down into the valley, they came in open day in long, light columns which indicated the movement of divisions. At the same time Colonel Lawrence accomplished one of his master-strokes east of the river. A substantial mounted force of Arabs, supported by British armoured cars and a French



"THE BLUFF"

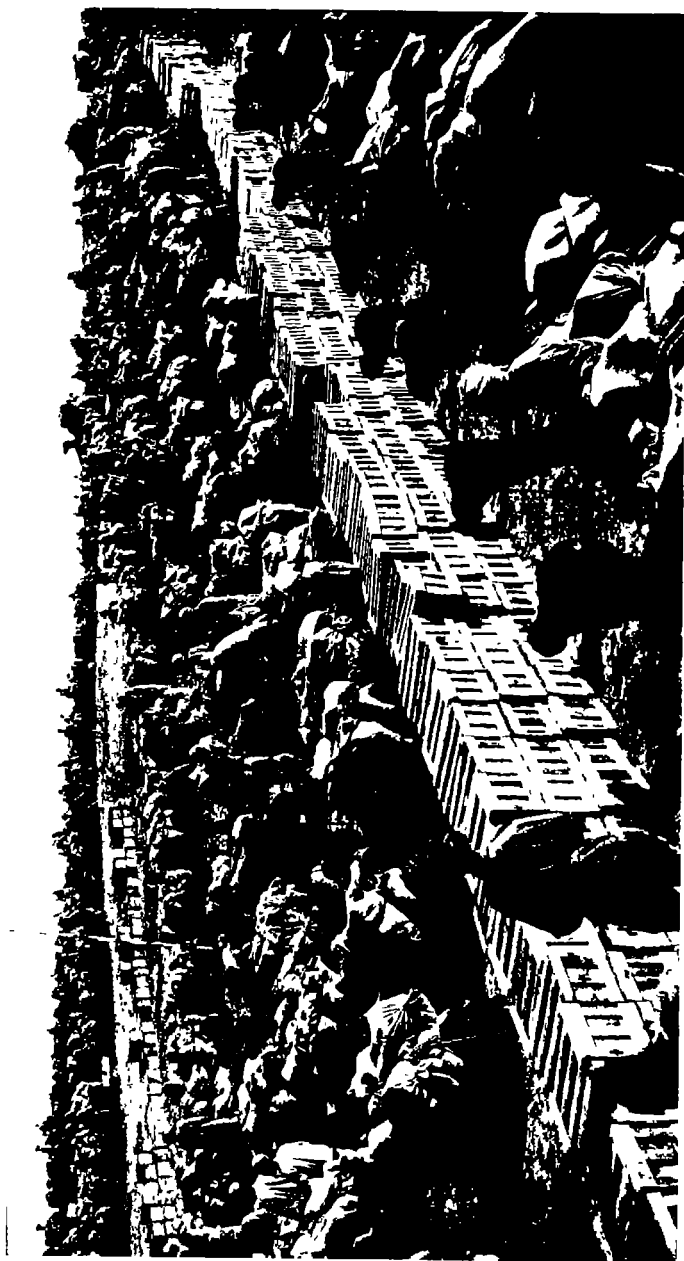
*Taken by Lieut-Col. W. H. Scott, 9th L.H. Regt.
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2829*



DUMMY HORSES IN THE JORDAN VALLIY, PREPARED IN ORDER TO DECEIVE
THE ENEMY CONCERNING GENERAL ALLENBY'S IMMINENT OFFENSIVE

*Taken by Lieut-Col. M. W. Carey, 1st L.H. Fld. Amb.
Aust. War Museum Collection No. B2967*

To face 10686



TRANSPORT CAMELS.

Aust War Mus, um Official Photo No B1612

To face p 687

mountain battery, gathered at Kasr el Azrak, some fifty miles east of Amman, as a preliminary to a series of raids on the railway north, south, and west of Deraa. Lawrence's agents, appearing in the Amman district with plenty of British gold, began to buy up all available horsefeed from the local Arabs, and dropped hints that it was needed in the near future for the maintenance of British cavalry. Over the first fortnight of September, when Allenby was steadily massing his forces on the west, the enemy was increasingly vigilant on the east. He does not appear actually to have increased his strength there; but it is certain that he took no special steps to meet the great British concentration upon Sharon.

Further than that, the enemy's Intelligence as to Allenby's new dispositions had entirely broken down. So successful had been the night movement of Chauvel's horsemen that, when Barrow, Macandrew, and Hodgson had their three divisions camped in the olive-groves west of Ludd and the orange-groves around Jaffa, the enemy still believed Hodgson and Barrow to be in the Jordan valley. A captured German Intelligence map dated September 17th, only two days before Allenby moved to the attack—showed the Australian Mounted Division in the valley together with the Indian infantry and the two Jewish battalions; Barrow's 4th Cavalry Division was believed to be at Jericho, Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters still at Talat ed Dumm, and Shea's 60th Infantry Division on the hills east of the Nablus road. This map indicated the German belief that, far from there being any diminution in the cavalry in the valley, there was evidence of a recent addition of twenty-three squadrons. The British policy of secrecy and deception had succeeded beyond all anticipation. When Chaytor's Force was alone in the Jordan valley, the enemy believed the British force there to be stronger than it had been at any time during the summer. Allenby had on the eve of his advance reinforced his western front by two complete mounted divisions and one infantry division, and had increased his guns from 70 to 301; yet a captured report of a German airman, dated September 15th, stated as the result of reconnaissance: "Some re-grouping of cavalry units is apparently in progress on the enemy's left flank, otherwise nothing unusual to report."

While all arms deserve commendation for the precautions observed, and while the schemes to mislead the enemy served a very useful purpose, the main factor in the success of Allenby's secret concentration was the air force. So active and superior were the British and Australian pilots and observers, that while in one week in June 100 enemy machines appeared over the British lines, the weekly average in August was only eighteen. The excellence of the young Australian airmen became about this time very marked. On the front there were now six British squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and the No. 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps. During the eight weeks before September 19th, when fifteen enemy machines were destroyed on the front, all fell to the Australians. Further than that (to quote from the official narrative of the Australian body), "this squadron was responsible for all strategical reconnaissances and photography, carried out numerous attacks on ground targets with bombs and machine-gun fire, escorted all bomb raids, and carried out hostile aircraft patrols daily. From the commencement of July until the date of the armistice with Turkey, October 31st, the flying hours of the squadron reached the substantial total of 2,863, an average of over 700 hours a month. In this work the Australians accomplished 157 strategical reconnaissances, 77 photographic reconnaissances, and 150 bomb raids, in which 47,000 lbs. of bombs were dropped and 240,000 machine-gun rounds were fired." The only large bombing aeroplane (a Handley-Page) to be used on the front had arrived in Egypt by air from England during the summer, and, as a recognition of the good work of the Australians, was given to No. 1 Squadron, and entrusted to Captain Ross Smith.

On September 16th Chauvel drove from his Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters at Talat ed Dumm, and the same afternoon re-opened his new advanced-headquarters about fifty miles away, at the German village of Sarona, a few miles north of Jaffa. His old camp, with its rows of large tents—very conspicuous in a few acres of stony ground on the heights of the Wilderness—was left standing, with a few men to keep the lights burning at night. Situated on the main Jericho road, the spot was one of the dustiest in the world, and only close observation would have discovered its

emptiness. Allenby had been peremptory in his demand for secrecy, and the observance of his orders was a remarkable tribute to the far-reaching influence of his dominant personality. Officers who sought Chauvel's headquarters in the Saron area on the day after his arrival received only headshakes, and even emphatic denials, when they insisted that he was in the neighbourhood. Orders dealing with the forthcoming operations as a whole were not passed beyond corps, and until the eve of the attack exact information as to time was denied even to divisional commanders and brigadiers. Never during the campaign had discipline in all ranks been so exacting, nor had service ever been given more cheerfully and whole-heartedly. The army was moving in the dark, but its confidence in its Commander-in-Chief was complete.

The attack was ordered to begin at dawn on the morning of September 19th. Bulfin with the XXI Corps was to advance on the eight-mile front between the railway and the sea, and at the same time to occupy the foot-hills south-east of Jiljulieh. Having cleared a gap for the cavalry, the infantry divisions were to swing to the right on the line Hableh-Tul Keram, and then, continuing north-east, to strike for the Attara-Samaria area north-west of Nablus. This advance would, while rolling up the Eighth Turkish Army on Sharon, and forcing it along the Nablus-Jenin road towards the cavalry on the Esdraelon plain, at the same time menace the communications of the Seventh Army along the railway and road to Jenin, and leave only the roads to Beisan and to the Jordan at Jisr ed Damieh open for its escape. As soon as the gap was driven through the trenches on the plain, and the infantry had won the crossings over the Nahr Falik, Chauvel with his three mounted divisions was to ride rapidly north, swing north-east, and traverse the passes in the ridges which linked the heights of Samaria with Mount Carmel. Then, emerging on the Esdraelon plain at Abu Shushe and Megiddo (the ancient Armageddon), Chauvel was to seize the railway junction at El Afule and the Turkish headquarters at Nazareth, and at the same time to advance in force down the valley of Jezreel to the Jordan at Beisan. That movement would close all escape to the two Turkish armies except by the bridge at Damieh and a few fords.

On the night of the 18th Chetwode was to advance the 53rd Division on his right flank—which was somewhat thrown back—and so be ready to advance towards Damieh and the other lower river-crossings. Chetwode's further action was to depend upon the measure of success on Sharon; but he was to be prepared to move at once with both the 10th and the 53rd Divisions.

Meanwhile, the Arabs—who were now supported by a number of British armoured cars, a detachment of the Egyptian Camel Corps specially trained for demolition work, and a detachment of Gurkhas—engaged upon useful work east of Jordan. The column at Kasr el Azrak had moved north to the Hauran, where it received reinforcements from both the Arab tribes and the Druses. On September 16th the force blew up a bridge and destroyed a section of the railway fifteen miles south of Deraa, and then, moving swiftly, demolished further sections north and west of the important junction. Thus on the eve of Allenby's attack all railway traffic moving south towards the three Turkish armies was suspended.

Chaytor, who on the 16th took over the command of the troops in the Jordan valley, was to await developments. With the weak force at his disposal, he had no sound prospect of shaking the Fourth Army opposed to him until the whole Turkish fabric on the west had been disorganised by the infantry and the enveloping sweep of Chauvel's cavalry. The Turks supplied further evidence of their ignorance of the British plan by continuing to work vigorously at the improvement of their Jordan defences; while Allenby was concentrating his troops on Sharon, they were digging and wiring a new line of posts across the valley from the foot-hills about 2,000 yards north of Shunet Nimrin to the Umm esh Shert crossing. Chaytor was ordered to patrol freely on both sides of the river, and, as soon as the enemy showed any signs of retirement, to push vigorously east and north and seize the Damieh bridge. The northern movement would block the escape of the Turks at Damieh; the advance on Gilead would, it was hoped, force the Fourth Army back in disorder upon Amman; the capture of Amman itself would put the Anzacs across the line of retreat of the enemy force at Maan.

Very significant was the contrast between day and night

on the Jaffa-Jerusalem road and the country immediately north and south, as the fateful day of September 19th approached. By day the maritime plain was to the casual observer as it had been all through the summer. The traffic on the roads and tracks was normal; there was no outward indication of a vast concentration, although a ride through the olive- and orange-groves discovered endless lines of horses and mile after mile of resting camels, wide areas of horse-transport, and great parks of motor-lorries. A few miles further north, each wady and patch of broken ground was packed with the ready infantry; while in every camp officers bent over maps in their eagerness to perfect their knowledge of the great tract of strange country ahead. At nightfall the still countryside awakened miraculously into intense but orderly activity. Every metalled highway, every crooked track across the fields, became in an hour crowded with all sorts of transport going west and north. Endless strings of camels, strangely silent and ghostly in the night, followed the native paths; while the prepared roads teemed with motor-lorries and horse- and mule-drawn vehicles. So vast and widespread was the movement that all men feared it must become known to the enemy only a few miles away.

CHAPTER XLI

SHARON AND SAMARIA

By midnight on the 18th the concentration was complete. The four divisions of infantry which were to attack between the railway and the sea were forward, ready for the assault; the artillery, amply supplied with shells, and its ranges determined with deadly accuracy, awaited the hour for the appointed bombardment; the three divisions of cavalry were close behind. Adjoining the coast was Shea's trusty 60th Division. In July seven battalions of the battered Londoners had been sent to France, and two others broken up for reinforcements. The division was then built up with Indians, but still retained its old effectiveness and keenness for the offensive. On its right was the 7th (Meerut) Division, then the 75th and the 3rd (Lahore); east of the railway was the 54th, then the 10th west of the Nablus road, and the 53rd on the east, with Chaytor's force in the valley. Immediately in rear of the infantry on the coast was Macandrew with the 5th Cavalry Division; on his right Barrow's 4th Cavalry Division, with the 3rd and 4th Brigades of the Australian Mounted Division—which on the opening day were to be held by Chauvel in reserve, a few miles further back. The 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade, under Onslow, was, for the opening phase of the operations, attached to the XXI Corps. Onslow's mission was to make an oblique blow at Tul Keram when the line was broken, and then to push into the hills across the main line of the Turkish retreat from Samaria, and cut the railway leading to Jenin.

To reach the enemy's communications at El Afule Chauvel's divisions had to ride fifty miles in twenty-four hours; Beisan, on the Jordan, was about eighty miles from their advanced point of concentration. For a movement so prolonged, and so important in its probable effect upon the whole campaign, Allenby's orders were singularly brief and clear. It was recognised that, provided the infantry made a swift, clean breach in the two systems of trenches, and if Intelligence was correct in its belief that behind those systems the enemy had no reserves of importance south of Nazareth,

the mounted divisions had little to do but ride straight and hard on their objectives. Chauvel wisely gave Macandrew and Barrow considerable discretion. Macandrew was to follow the 60th Division, Barrow the 7th. They were only to move after consultation with the two infantry divisional commanders, and were to be careful to keep well to the west on their advance, and not to become involved with the Turks about Tul Keram. The battle on Sharon was no concern of theirs; once clear of the gap, they were to avoid the struggle and, risking all in their rear, were to speed for El Afule, Nazareth, and Beisan, and rely upon the infantry to drive the enemy back to them.

The first blow in the battle was struck by the Australian airmen. Leaving the aerodrome in the Handley-Page at 1 a.m. on the 19th, Ross Smith, accompanied by Lieutenants E. A. Mulford,¹ M. D. Lees,² and A. V. McCann,³ dropped sixteen hundredweight of bombs on the railway junction at El Afule, and during the same night thirty-two hundredweight on the German aerodrome at Jenin. Soon afterwards the Turkish army headquarters at Nablus and Tul Keram were heavily bombed, with so much success that the enemy's signal-services were shattered and his communications almost entirely destroyed as the battle was opening. At 4.30 a.m., while it was still dark, the 300 British guns on the Sharon sector burst into action. The surprise of the enemy, who had been accustomed only to intermittent shelling from seventy pieces, was absolute. For fifteen minutes his trenches were jolted and torn; and his troops—most of whom had been asleep when the storm broke upon them—were in a state of wild disorder when, as the barrage lifted, the four divisions of British and Indian infantry swept towards them with the bayonet.

Advancing in the dawn, impetuously but in beautiful order, the battalions were close to the advanced trenches before the Turks had organised their firing line. In places the resistance was feeble; but along much of the line the attackers suffered

¹ Lieut. E. A. Mulford, D.C.M. No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Electrician; of Waverley, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 15 Dec., 1890.

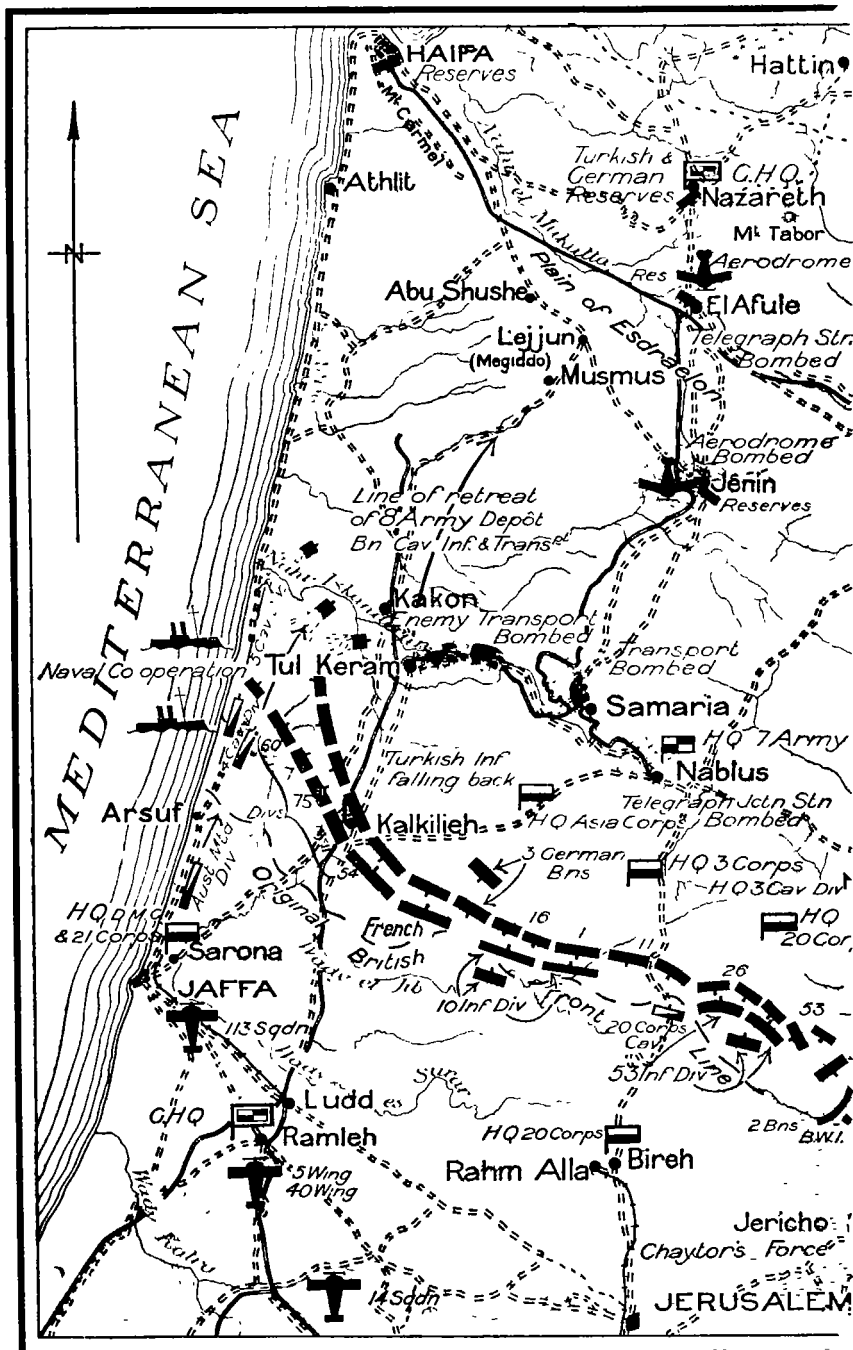
² Lieut. M. D. Lees, No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Bank clerk; of Goulburn, N.S.W.; b. Goulburn, 3 May, 1895.

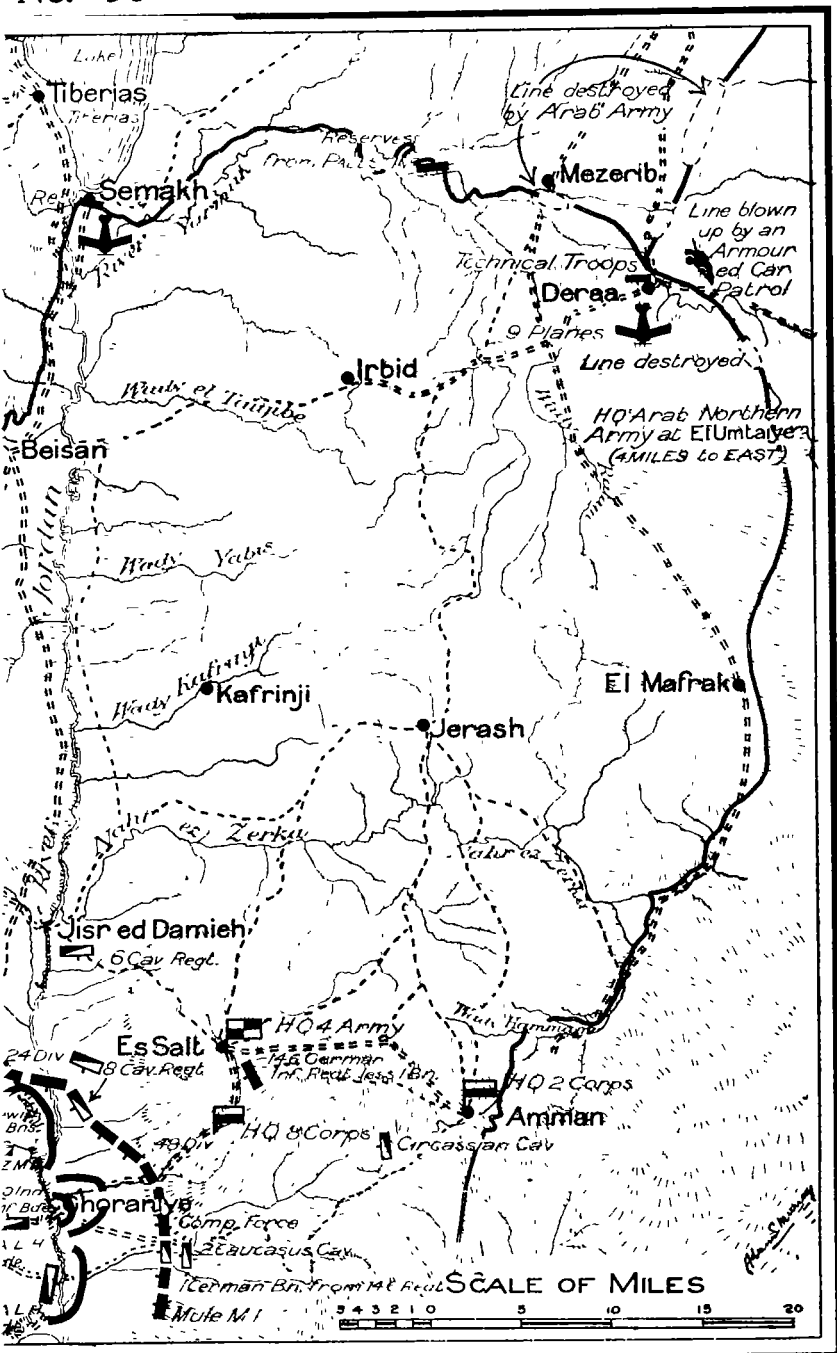
³ Lieut. A. V. McCann, D.F.C. No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Farmer; of Kyneton District, Vic.; b. Yea, Vic., 4 July, 1893.

severe losses as they crossed the low open flats leading up to the defences on the sand-ridges. As they gained the trenches, however, and began to fight with bombs and bayonets, the Turks broke and fled, leaving many prisoners; and the British, taking up the pursuit, went rapidly on to the reserve barrier 3,000 yards behind. This, too, was swiftly overrun. On the right, in the foot-hills near Rafat, the French detachment had for a time very bitter fighting, and later the attack of the 75th Division was stubbornly resisted at Et Tireh. But on the left the 60th Division had rushed irresistibly over the enemy's lines; soon after 7 a.m. they had opened for the cavalry the crossing at the mouth of the Nahr Falik, and then swung away to the north-east towards Tul Keram; the 7th, equally successful, swung round and marched on Et Taiyibeh, while the 75th was still fighting for Et Tireh on its right. Et Tireh was captured by 11 o'clock; further to the right the 3rd Division, also wheeling to the east, overcame stout resistance and advanced through Jiljulieh, Kefr Saba, and Kalkilieh, joining up with the 54th Division north of the Wady Kanah. The whole Turkish line upon Sharon and the foot-hills had been shattered, the achievement being so swift and decisive as to exceed the brightest hopes of the Commander-in-Chief.

Early in the morning the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions moved from the orange-groves round Sharon, and formed up close behind the 60th and 7th Infantry Divisions, while the Australian Mounted Division marched from Ludd to Sarona. About 7 a.m. the cavalrymen picked their way through the front line of the enemy's broken trenches, and half-an-hour later were riding through the troops of the 60th Division at the mouth of the Nahr Falik. Moving at the trot, with ground scouts working wide, the twelve thousand horsemen streamed northwards up the rolling plain. Over the first mile or two the eager Indians had a little play with their lances upon Turkish fugitives from the trenches; but these were running north-east towards the foot-hills, and were not pursued. Then lance and sabre glinting in the morning sunshine, the brigades poured on to the crossings of the Nahr Iskanderuneh, a fine stream flanked in places by wide marshes. The 5th Division had a clear run all the way, and the 4th, after a little delay

MAP





in passing the barbed-wire about the trenches, made equally good progress. After a brief halt, Macandrew led the 5th towards the Abu Shushe pass between Samaria and Carmel, while Barrow headed for the pass at Mus Mus.

By nightfall Barrow's leading brigade was close to the entrance to the Wady Arah, which leads to the Mus Mus Pass, and one regiment was pushed forward for some miles. In either of these long, narrow, and winding passes small enemy forces might have held up the cavalry for many hours—perhaps long enough to have enabled the Turks to re-form on the Esdraelon plain and cover their retreat with a strong rear-guard. But from the time Macandrew and Barrow cleared the trenches until they reached Esdraelon they saw nothing of the enemy. Allenby's information was correct. The Turks, confident as to their front line and desperately short of troops, had no reserves between Afule and the firing line. A Turkish officer, who was ridden down by Barrow's advance-guard just before dark, supplied the valuable information that an enemy infantry force, with machine-guns, was already under orders to march from El Afule and block the pass at Mus Mus. Barrow—accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Foster,⁴ a brilliant young Australian who was his chief staff officer—at once moved forward, and urged the leading brigade to press down through the pass in the dark. Followed by the whole division, it debouched in the early morning on the Esdraelon plain at Megiddo,⁵ and about the same time the 5th Division gained the plain at Abu Shushe. As the vanguard rode out of the Mus Mus defile on to the level country at dawn, they came upon a battalion of Turkish infantry with machine-guns, the force which had marched in the night from El Afule. The Turks were in the act of deploying from column, when the British leader of the 2nd Lancers galloped down upon them. The Indians crashed through their lines with the lance, wheeled, and repeated the charge. In a few minutes they had killed forty-six and rounded up 470 prisoners. Barrow then marched on El Afule. Meanwhile

⁴ Col. W. J. Foster, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (1), Yeo. Mtd. Div. (later 4th Cav. Div.), 1917/19. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; b. Warwick, Q'land, 8 Dec., 1881. Died, 15 Nov., 1927.

⁵ When, in recognition of his splendid services, General Allenby was raised to the peerage, he took Megiddo as his title, a compliment which was appreciated by all those who rode with Chauvel upon this grand enterprise.

Macandrew, with the 5th Cavalry Division, was crossing the plain—an area of rich soil now overgrown with a tall crop of dry grasses and weeds—further west; and, while the 14th Brigade, anticipating Barrow, galloped down on El Afule and captured it without serious resistance, the 13th Brigade under Kelly headed for the steep but well-metalled road which leads up from the plain to Nazareth.

Liman von Sanders, at his headquarters at Nazareth, was aware by the evening of the 19th of the overthrow of his right flank on Sharon, although he was ignorant of the extent of the disaster or of the rapid advance of Chauvel's mounted divisions. That night, however, covering parties were formed for the protection of Nazareth. But although this step was taken, the leader and his staff do not appear to have feared an immediate attack.

As, at dawn, the Gloucesters and Indians trotted up the road to the little saucer on the southern edge of the heights of Galilee which contains the bright town of modern Nazareth, they had abundant evidence that they were not expected. A German motor-lorry convoy, comprising some sixty or seventy vehicles, was slowly climbing the track. Some of the drivers showed a disposition to fight, but the excited horsemen ruthlessly shot them down and rode them off the track; many lorries were hurtled down into deep gorges; all were in a few minutes flung out of action, and the brigade went clattering into Nazareth.

The heart of the town was occupied without resistance, and several officers and officials were captured in their beds at the Hotel Germania. But stiff resistance quickly developed, and progress towards von Sanders' headquarters, 200 yards away, was temporarily arrested. This enabled von Sanders and most of his staff officers to withdraw to the French orphanage on the ridge behind; but so hurried was their exit that they abandoned many of the official papers of the campaign, and these were secured by Kelly. The British also captured about 2,000 prisoners, chiefly clerks and other details. But a mistake had been made in not enveloping the town, before entering it, and especially in not seizing the road leading out to Tiberias. Shut up in the narrow streets and fired on from three sides, the British, after raiding the

headquarters building, were compelled to withdraw, and von Sanders made his escape by the Tiberias road.

Next morning the Indians and yeomanry returned to the attack, outflanked the enemy on the hills, drove him back out of range of the city, and re-occupied it. That night in the moonlight British outposts towards the west were encountered by a column of the enemy garrison of Haifa, which was attempting to march by Nazareth to Tiberias. The Indians of the 18th Lancers at once dashed out mounted, and in a galloping charge speared many of the Turks, took 300 prisoners, and dispersed the column.

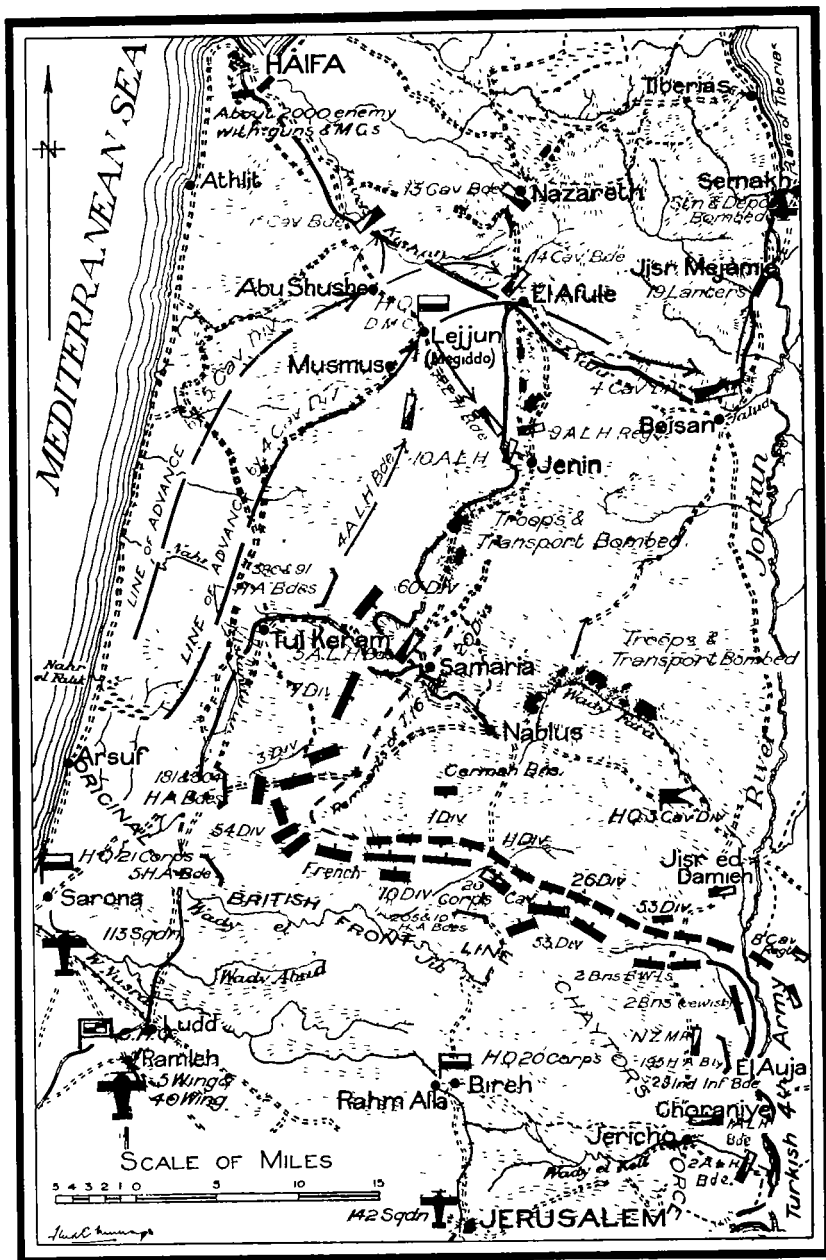
Corps commanders, even of cavalry, are seldom in the saddle during operations. While his two leading divisions were riding fast up the Esdraelon plain with detachments thrown out on either side to watch towards Haifa and Samaria, Chauvel with Desert Corps Advanced-Headquarters was following close behind by motor-car. The dramatic overthrow of the enemy was emphasised by the great fleet of fifty or sixty cars which on the morning of the 19th trailed across enemy territory. Halting that night at Liktera, Chauvel pushed on early on the 20th, and established fighting headquarters at Megiddo. The pace was too strong for the use of wire communications. To supplement the wireless, Chauvel had organised a special force of light horse and yeomanry liaison officers, under Lieutenant-Colonel E. M. Williams^a of the Australian forces, to act as gallopers between the divisions and Corps Headquarters. But so swift was the progress that, before the first day had closed, these officers had ridden their horses to a standstill, and their service was limited. By the use of wireless and airmen, however, Chauvel was able to keep in intimate touch with his advanced troops. With El Afule and Nazareth in hand, and with good news of the progress of the infantry, he ordered Barrow to move at once on Beisan. The road was clear down the valley of Jezreel, and Beisan was gained and the north-western road from Samaria blocked late in the afternoon, by which time the 4th Division had covered eighty miles in thirty-four hours without off-saddling. Chauvel's great purpose had been achieved.

^a Brig E. M. Williams, DSO, psc Commanded 1st Anzac Mtd Troops (in France), 1916/17. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Bendigo, Vic., 12 Feb., 1884.

The enemy's general headquarters at Nazareth, and all communications of the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies by railway or main roads, were in the hands of his cavalry; only the bridge at Damieh and a few fords remained open. Chauvel's casualties had not numbered a score.

Chauvel's bearing during these two momentous days indicated one of his greatest qualities as a leader. A master of organisation, his plans were laid with a degree of thoroughness which was shown at every stage as the operation smoothly unfolded. Then, satisfied with his work, he awaited the issue with a remarkable absence of anxiety. As the bombardment ceased on the morning of the 19th, when the thoughts of every man at the front were on the advancing British infantry, and when the fate of the great project was in the balance, Chauvel was seen walking down from his tent at Sarona to enjoy a leisurely swim in a pool in a wady. All through the long advance, which was to be carried up to Aleppo, nearly 400 miles away, his complete calm, his old-fashioned courtesy to all ranks, and the quiet, even almost languid, tone in which his rapid decisions were expressed in orders, gave his staff and his fighting commanders a steadying touch of inestimable value in that sustained test of endurance, where, from first to last, so much of the mounted enterprise was sheer gamble. Every leader felt that the serene and unpretentious little man at Corps Headquarters, who had led the mounted work unbrokenly from the Canal, was an organiser of victory. Chauvel had not the qualities, so marked in Allenby, which inspired and drove; but during operations he enjoyed a measure of trust rarely given by a composite force to its leader. All ranks believed implicitly that each task he set was one which could be done, and done without excessive cost.

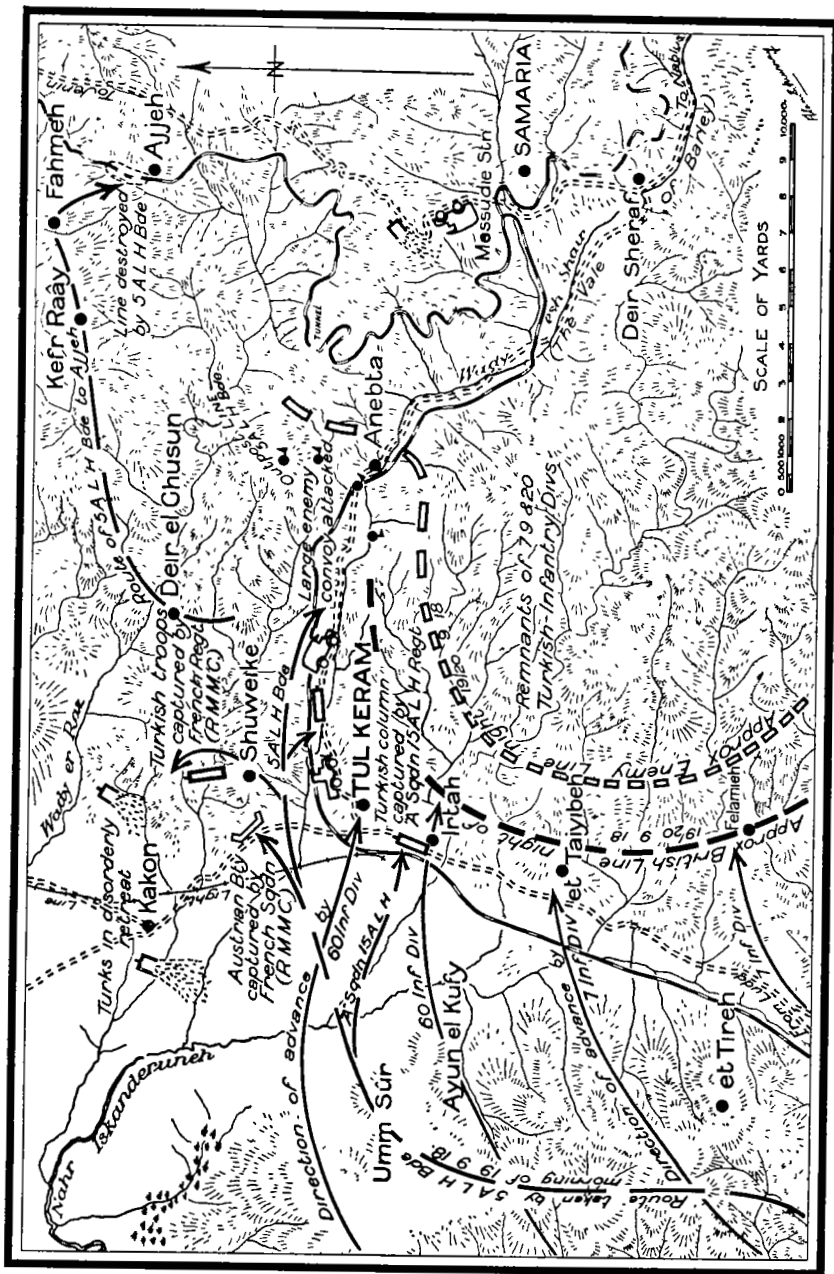
With the cavalry in possession of Esdraelon, and the enemy overthrown on the western sector, the task of the XXI and XX Corps was relatively simple. They were fighting an enemy already stricken, and doomed to collapse almost at once from lack of ammunition and supplies. As the Turks, reeling from the infantry blow, fell back in confusion towards Tul Keram and the foot-hills further south, Onslow, with the 5th Light Horse Brigade, was slipped through on the right of the



BATTLES OF SHARON AND SAMARIA. ADVANCE OF BRITISH CAVALRY—
POSITION AT 6 P.M. ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

7th Division. Moving quickly north, with orders to clear the infantry fighting as speedily as possible, the brigade arrived soon after midday on the plain west of Tul Keram. One squadron of the 15th Light Horse Regiment was sent in pursuit of a Turkish column moving north from Irta, while Onslow swung the rest of the brigade in to the north and north-east of Tul Keram. Here a squadron of the Frenchmen galloped down and captured an Austrian battery in action. As the brigade gained the foot-hills north-east of Tul Keram, the village was heavily bombed by a flight of British airmen. Already Tul Keram was crowded with fugitives from the fighting in the south, and the bursting bombs and the appearance of the cavalry intensified the confusion. Bustling from the village, a disorganised host some thousands strong swarmed east along the wide Vale of Barley which leads up through the hills to Nablus. Tul Keram was still defended by numerous machine-guns. Leaving it to be assailed by the superior force of the approaching troops of the 60th Division, Onslow turned his regiments on the column flying towards Anebta. Working boldly on either flank, the Australians and Frenchmen found the Turks an easy prey. They made little effort to fight, but surrendered in droves as they were ridden down or challenged from the adjoining hills with dismounted fire. To complete their chaos, relays of British and Australian airmen, sent out to seek such an opportunity, bombed and machine-gunned the head of the column, and made havoc among teams and vehicles in a narrow pass. Here on the road the Turks were terribly punished from the air and caught by the horsemen as they attempted to break away at the sides. By 6 p.m. fifteen guns, 2,000 prisoners, and great quantities of material had been captured by Onslow's brigade, while Tul Keram had been entered by the Londoners and Indians. Part of the French regiment had been detached in pursuit of a body of Turks moving north from Shuweike. The chase was a long one, but very successful, and the Frenchmen returned on the following morning with some hundreds of prisoners.

Onslow's orders were to push on with all speed to his second objective at Ajjah, in the hills, where he was to cut the railway between Nablus and Jenin. But his brigade had become so scattered that it was 2 a.m. on the 20th before he



was able to move. His route lay over extremely rough and trackless country, and the brigade strung out over some ten or fifteen miles. At 7 a.m. two squadrons of the 14th, under the sure leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel Langley, succeeded in reaching and breaking up the railway line. From Ajjeh the brigade was to have marched at once by the road to Jenin, driving fugitives towards Chauvel's cavalry; but, owing to the wide disposition of the brigade and the roughness of the country, Onslow decided to re-assemble his regiments at Tul Keram before marching on Jenin. The regiments were not collected until 7 p.m., and soon afterwards orders were received to move on Nablus early on the following morning.

Meanwhile the success of the XXI Corps on the left had been followed by an offensive almost equally shaking to the enemy in the hills about the Nablus road. Chetwode had, as ordered, advanced the 53rd Division on his right flank on the night of the 18th, and awaited the word to attack strongly with both the 53rd and the 10th. With the enemy upon Sharon and the foot-hills rolled up and in flight, Allenby commanded him to advance. On the night of the 19th the 53rd Division moved forward on the east of the Bireh-Nablus road, while the 10th struck north-eastwards along the Furkah-Selfit and Berukin-Kefr Haris ridges. Both divisions met with determined opposition. The country consisted of a series of rocky mountain ridges, and the enemy, who had always anticipated an advance directly on Nablus, was fighting on selected positions, well dug and built up with sangars, and covered by wire entanglements. All through the night of the 19th and on the morning of the 20th, the fighting was heavy and bloody. The Turkish infantry, still unaware that Chauvel's mounted divisions were in possession of their communications, resisted with exceptional stubbornness, and in places counter-attacked with temporary success. But the 10th and 53rd, although indifferently supported by artillery and paying dearly for their ground, made steady progress; and by clever outflanking and constant bayonet work the enemy was forced from ridge to ridge. On the morning of the 21st the north-easterly swing of the divisions of the XXI Corps began to affect the resistance in front of the 10th Division; the enemy's rear was already in a chaotic condition, and by nightfall the

British were driving the Turks before them. The XX Corps had then reached a line between Neby Belan (north-east of Nablus) and Mount Ebal, while the XXI Corps was on a line extending from Belan through Attara to the village which marks the site of the ancient city of Samaria.

Marching from Tul Keram for Nablus at 5 a.m. on the 21st, Onslow led his brigade without opposition up the Vale of Barley and through the village of Anebta, where he was reinforced by three troops of Hertfordshire yeomanry and the No. 2 Light Armoured Car Battery, under Captain Holloway. Enemy rear-guards were encountered near Deir Sheraf, and about the same time Onslow gained contact with British infantry which was pressing in upon Nablus from the south-west. As the Vale of Barley leads up into the ranges, it narrows down, and is flanked by stony hillsides. Small parties of Turks, supported by machine-guns, swept the track from positions on the heights and from the valley itself. Pushing forward the armoured cars, Onslow at the same time sent dismounted men wide on either flank, and the enemy, taken in the rear, surrendered freely with their guns. Major Denson, of the 14th Light Horse Regiment, then moved rapidly with his squadron on Nablus, closely followed by the Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique.

At Nablus the valley passes between the austere peaks of Ebal and Gerizim. The town—a long, huddled, narrow pile of old buildings—stands on the south bank of the Wady esh Shair, with the bare slopes of Gerizim rising immediately behind. In old and happier days the waters of the wady, cunningly dammed and directed, spread over the fertile soil of the Vale of Barley, and the traveller from Nablus to Tul Keram passed all the way through a luxurious garden. To-day the irrigation works are in ruins, but the Arabs still continue to water a limited area on the narrow flat about the town and down the valley to the west. Nablus, therefore, unlike most of the bare cities of Palestine, is graced by softening plantations, which gave good cover to enemy machine-gunners and riflemen, and Denson's men, as they rode forward, were fired on at short range. But the opposition was without heart or organisation. Travelling fast along the road on the northern bank of the wady, the Australians left



SCENE ON THE NAZARETH ROAD AFTER THE ADVANCE OF THE 13TH BRITISH CAVALRY BRIGADE

Aust War Museum General Photo No B270

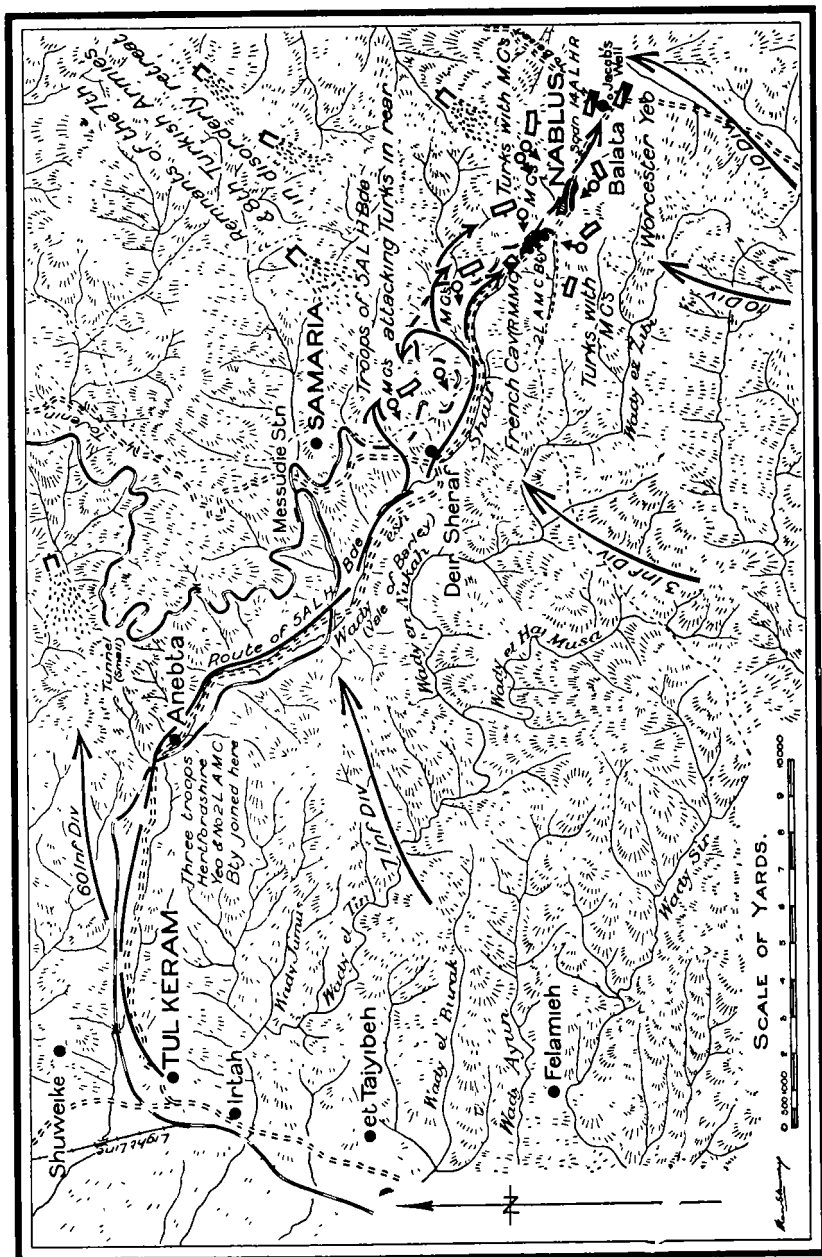
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TURKISH PRISONERS CAPTURED AT JENIN.

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B264

To face p 703.



OPERATIONS OF 5TH A.L.H. BRIGADE, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1918.

Nablus on their right, and went on past Jacob's Well to Balata, where they were joined by a detachment of Worcester yeomanry.

To the French colonials, therefore, fell the honour of the entry into Nablus, where, as usual, the victors were hailed with a demonstration of joy by the accommodating Arabs. Between 800 and 900 Turks were captured by the brigade about the town; but the place had already been evacuated, and Nablus was formally surrendered to Onslow by the civic authorities. The brigade was then concentrated at Balata, with orders to pursue the enemy towards Beisan. Soon afterwards, however, this arrangement was cancelled, and Onslow was directed to march back to Deir Sheraf and thence to rejoin the Australian Mounted Division at Jenin. The Australians of the two regiments had in their first operation as light horse shown the same zest for the offensive which had distinguished them in the Camel Brigade, and the Frenchmen a desire for mounted action which was at times difficult to restrain.

The Turkish infantry of the Seventh Army had on the night of the 19th and the morning of the 20th fought Chetwode's two divisions with much stubbornness, and a considerable portion of the Eighth Army, wheeling back before Bulfin's blow into the foot-hills from Sharon, had for many hours maintained some show of order. But the Turkish commanders, while urging resistance, had, after the early morning of the 19th, no doubt as to the disaster which had fallen so suddenly upon them. From Eighth Army Headquarters at Tul Keram the staff had a clear and full view of the swift Battle of Sharon. Officers, even without their glasses, could see in the sunrise the wide, irresistible sweep of the British infantry, and the diagonal flight of their own broken ranks towards the shelter of the foot-hills. A little later they saw that which was still more menacing and sinister—mass upon mass of the British cavalry, their lances glinting and sabres flashing in the morning sun, pouring rapidly up the plain, ignoring the opportunity of riding down the shattered Turkish infantry, and pressing on for the vital passes leading to Esdraelon. To the leaders at Tul Keram that great independent flood of British horse towards the north foretold com-

plete disaster. With Chauvel and his divisions on Esdraelon, continued resistance upon Samaria was suicide, and orders were therefore at once given for a partial retreat by the road to Jenin. Divisions still engaged were for the time kept in ignorance of the threatening tragedy; but all transport, and troops not actually fighting, were directed to the north. The British infantry blow had, however, been so overwhelming and far-reaching, the menace to Eighth Army Headquarters by Onslow's brigade and the airmen so immediate, and the spectacle of the swift passing hosts of Chauvel's horsemen so demoralising, that within a few hours all was confusion in the enemy's rear. Army headquarters itself was driven to shameful flight; communications were in tatters; orders were hasty, indecisive, and ineffective; a great army machine, complete and working smoothly, had, as by an earthquake, been sundered and flung down in ruins. An hour before dawn there had been order and confidence; now, still in the early morning, there was panic and dismay.

Struggling on during the night of the 19th, a Turkish infantry force some ten thousand strong sought escape by the road to Jenin. They were safe at night, but at dawn on the 20th were discovered by vigilant airmen, and harassed and battered as they fled. Already suffering from hunger, demoralised and footsore, and fearful that worse was to come, this host was soon out of control, and marched only under the impulse of fear of hostile airmen and pursuing cavalry. During the afternoon the head of the column, emerging from the narrow mountain road, straggled into the large village of Jenin, which stands on a hillside at the southern side of the Esdraelon plain. Chauvel, at his headquarters at Megiddo, some nine miles north-west, had been advised by aeroplane of the march of the column. Barrow's 4th Division was then riding for Beisan; Macandrew had a brigade of the 5th at Nazareth, and was holding El Afule and watching in the direction of Haifa, where the enemy had a force of reserves and some guns. But Wilson, with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade—the advance-guard of the Australian Mounted Division—was in hand at Megiddo, and Chauvel ordered him to ride rapidly for Jenin and intercept the fugitive force of the

enemy. Never had an operation unfolded more completely in accordance with the plans and wishes of a commander-in-chief.

The 3rd and 4th Light Horse Brigades had received with sharp feelings of disappointment their orders for the opening movement of the operations on 19th September. Having, with the New Zealanders, played the mounted lead in every advance since the Canal, the Australians had no appetite for following on the heels of the Indians. The two brigades took little or no part in the grand advance of the first day, and had no share in the wide-spread gallop over Esdraelon on the morning of the 20th. When, therefore, Wilson led the 9th and 10th Regiments (the 8th was in support) towards Jenin, the men were above themselves in their desire for action, and their keenness was sharpened by their eagerness to make play with their new swords. Already they had ridden fifty miles in less than twenty-four hours, and had been two days and nights with little or no sleep; but they forgot their weariness as they trotted and cantered towards Jenin in the late afternoon. Keeping pace with the light horsemen, the Notts Battery jangled in support of the brigade.

Lieutenant-Colonel Olden, who was in temporary command of the 10th, led the advance-guard at a speed of about ten miles an hour. The position was obscure, but every officer and man was animated by a resolve to make, if possible, of the enterprise a mounted engagement. Near Tannuk, about half-way to Jenin, a small enemy outpost was ridden down by the flank-guard of the 9th Regiment. Maintaining the pace, the regiments approached Jenin shortly before sunset, and saw a large Turkish force encamped in olive-groves north-east of Kefr Adan. The decision of the Australians was instantly taken. Lieutenant P. W. K. Doig,⁷ who had a troop on the right flank of the vanguard, led his men at the gallop with drawn swords into the enemy's camp. The surprise was complete; the Turks, flustered by the charge, surrendered without a fight. Supported by three other troops, Doig in a few minutes rounded up 1,800 enemy troops—which included a force of Germans—and 400 horses and mules.

⁷ Lieut. P. W. K. Doig, MC 10th L H Regt Contractor; of Wagin, W. Aust; b. Beltana, S Aust, 23 Dec., 1886.

Without halting his main body, Wilson pushed on for Jenin, swept round the town, and closed the roads leading out north and east. In the twilight the 10th Regiment then advanced on the town from the north, with the 9th on its right. Bewildered at the unexpected rush, already exhausted and dejected, and dreading the swords, the Turks everywhere surrendered. As the Australians rode into the streets, however, they were fired upon with rifles and machine-guns by men concealed in the houses. Throughout the long retreat the Germans fought bravely in the rear-guard of the broken army. This machine-gun party at Jenin for a time held up the light horsemen, and then endeavoured to escape in the darkness; but after some involved fighting they were caught by fire from Captain G. H. Bryant's⁸ machine-gun squadron, and surrendered. A few hundred of Wilson's horsemen were now in the dark in the midst of some 3,000 Turks, most of them armed; but the Australians, acting with a resolution which suggested the presence of a stronger force, proceeded briskly and confidently with the collecting of their prisoners. At the same time small bodies rode out along the roads from the town and seized two motor-lorry convoys with fifty vehicles.

Satisfied that the Turks would not show fight, Wilson pushed the 10th Regiment out to watch the Nablus road, and Lieutenant R. R. W. Patterson,⁹ of the machine-gun squadron, was sent with two guns in support. The night was very dark; Patterson hit the road some distance in advance of the Western Australians, and at once came into contact with the head of a Turkish column moving on Jenin from the south. He had only twenty-three men, and it was clear from the tramp of feet on the metalled-road that the Turks were in strength. While Patterson hesitated as to his course of action, Trooper T. B. George¹⁰ suggested that they should try to compel a surrender. Patterson agreed, and opened machine-gun fire over the heads of the approaching enemy. The Turks and Germans, confined on a narrow track between

⁸ Capt. G. H. Bryant Commanded 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqdn., 1918/19 Gardener; b. London, Eng., 25 Dec., 1882

⁹ Lieut. R. R. W. Patterson, M.C., M.M. 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Grazier; of Foster, Vic.; b. Footscray, Melb., Vic., 9 March, 1895.

¹⁰ L/Cpl T. B. George, D.C.M. (No. 1324, 3rd Aust. M.G. Sqdn.) Contractor; of Katanning, W. Aust.; b. Goulburn Park, near Nagambie, Vic., 2 Sept., 1897.

high hills on either side, did not know, until the machine-guns opened and the bullets whistled overhead, that the British were across their communications on the plain ahead. As the head of the column halted in confusion, Patterson ceased fire and shouted to them to surrender. By a lucky chance a German nurse who spoke ready English was marching with the officers at the head of the column, and Patterson, advancing, told her he was supported by a large force immediately behind. She interpreted Patterson's bluff to the officers, and, after a brief discussion, the column of 2,800 troops and four guns surrendered to the twenty-three Australians.

The handful of light horsemen who had been left in Jenin to collect and disarm the prisoners there passed a very ticklish night. A few score Australians were handling some thousands of Turks, who, as they discovered the weakness of their captors, expressed disgust at their surrender, resentfully objected to being herded together, and made spasmodic attempts to escape. But the light horsemen, freely showing their swords, rode confidently amongst them, and the night passed without fighting. At daylight, when Wilson was able to assemble his prisoners, he found that upwards of 8,000 enemy troops, including many officers of high rank and a few hundred Germans, were in his hands, together with five guns, several machine-guns, two aeroplanes, a waggon loaded with gold and silver money, and a large quantity of other booty. A great dump of ammunition and other war material at the railway station, about a mile to the south of the town, had been fired by the enemy as the Australians galloped up in the evening. This burned fiercely, with loud explosions, all through the night, and, lighting up the country for miles around, made the work of the victors easier. With the dawn swarms of Arabs, attracted by the fire and the news of Turkish disaster, poured in by all tracks towards Jenin to loot the fallen. If the natives of this old blood-drenched land have suffered by the wars of four thousand years, they have always been ready to seize all the compensation that offered. From Romani to Aleppo they hovered about the camps of the two armies, their eloquent lip-sympathy and well-paid assistance ever at the disposal of the conqueror of the day. In their

greedy scavenging in the battle-grounds they showed no practical sense of values. All roads and tracks from El Afule and Jenin, in the days which followed the descent of Chauvel's divisions, were thronged with strings of camels and donkeys and women staggering along with huge loads of every class of war-material. Few of the trophies were of the least use or value to the proud men of the race who, themselves free of burden, directed the pillage and urged their wives and animals to greater speed and effort.

In the early morning the Turkish prisoners, under the escort of the 8th Light Horse Regiment, were marched to Megiddo. Thirsty, footsore, and reduced by dysentery, the great straggling host limped across the plain, their one cry "Water, water!"—tragic but eloquent tribute to the complete success of Allenby's bold strategy. And the success of the cavalry trap at Jenin was only the beginning of the harvest. Onslow's brigade, marching from Deir Sheraf and Messudie by the road to Jenin, swept before it the remnants of the Turkish forces on the western side of the ranges of Samaria. The only remaining way of escape for the residue of the two armies was by the north-eastern track across the mountains to Beisan, and the easterly tracks to Jisr ed Damieh and other Jordan crossings. Grim disaster awaited them. Each morning during operations, the airmen of the No. 1 Australian Squadron—which was performing the reconnaissance work for the army—sped out with the first sign of dawn in search of bombing targets for their expectant fellows at all the British aerodromes. Flying low over Samaria on the morning of the 21st, the Australians spied a huge column of enemy transport and troops following the narrow tracks along the wadys leading down to Beisan and the Jordan further south. Using their wireless, they passed the information in a few seconds to the aerodromes, where lines of machines loaded with bombs, and the airmen standing by, were ready to move.

Within less than an hour the destruction of the enemy began; and perhaps nowhere else in the war was the efficacy of the air force, as a sheer fighting agency against troops on the ground, so convincingly demonstrated. The main enemy column, after passing from Balata to Khurbet Ferweh,

turned off along the Wady Fara towards the Jordan. About nine miles further on the Wady Fara passes through a gorge; and, as this was entered by the head of the force, down swooped the vanguard of the British and Australian bombers. Descending to within a few hundred feet of their helpless quarry, the airmen quickly smashed up the leading vehicles and choked the gorge. Then flying up and down the doomed, chaotic train of motors, guns, and horse-transport, through which surged thousands of distracted troops, the pilots and observers continued their terrible work with both bombs and machine-guns. As one relay of machines exhausted its ammunition, its place was taken by another, while the first sped back to the aerodrome to refill. Some pilots made as many as four of these trips during the day. The enemy drivers fled in panic from their vehicles; one small detachment endeavoured to escape by a side track from Ain Shibleh, only to be pursued and broken; and the remnant, when it reached Beisan, was met and captured by Barrow's Indians and yeomanry. The fighting troops, scattered from the shambles on the road, were chased and machine-gunned as they sought cover across the hills.

A disorderly but still united retreat had in a few hours been turned into an utter rout. Each enemy officer and man sought only his own safety in flight and hiding. By their work on less than five miles of road, the airmen had caused the destruction or abandonment of 87 guns, 55 motor-lorries, and 916 other vehicles. But this was only a fraction of their achievement. In bombing and checking the columns, and scattering the fighting men, they had removed the possibility of any serious attempt to engage Barrow at Beisan, or to oppose Chaytor's blocking movement up the Jordan valley. The work of the airmen, following on the blow of the infantry, had taken all the fight out of the Turks before they reached the cavalry cordon beyond. While the great column was being shattered along the Wady Fara, Barrow, advised of its approach, was in readiness to act; but his troops advancing up the road from Beisan had only to collect panic-stricken fugitives. That night Chaytor moved in strength along the west bank of the Jordan, and at 1 a.m. on the 22nd seized the bridge at Jisr ed Damieh. The infantry, pressing over

Samaria from the south, cleared the hills of isolated remaining bodies of Turks, too wretched to offer serious resistance. One small column, attempting to cross the Jordan at Makhadet Abu Naj (five miles south of Beisan), was caught by the 11th Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier-General C. L. Gregory.¹¹ The Turks were charged by the Indians and Middlesex yeomanry on both sides of the river; many were killed with sword and lance, and almost the whole force was captured or killed. By September 24th the destruction of the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies, with all their guns, equipment, and transport, was complete. Not more than a few hundred stragglers succeeded in crossing the river. Allenby's victory was almost without parallel in its thoroughness.

So far Chauvel had been content to cover Haifa with part of the 5th Cavalry Division. But, when once the destruction of the two Turkish armies on Samaria was assured, he moved to the capture of this important coastal town. Air reconnaissance reported Haifa already evacuated, and on the afternoon of the 22nd a detachment of armoured cars and the No. 7 Light Car Patrol proceeded by the Nazareth road to take possession. The little column was under Brigadier-General A. D'A. King,¹² who was in command of Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps artillery. Anticipating no fighting, King was ordered to establish himself as military governor of the town. He was accompanied by Major Tackaberry (of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Regiment), who was to fill the position of Town-Major. Descending from the slopes above Galilee, the party sped over the Esdraelon plain, and on towards Haifa by the road which runs between Kishon and the foot of Mount Carmel. About four miles from the town Turks showed in a redoubt close to the track; but a few bursts of machine-gun fire sufficed to compel their surrender, and seventy prisoners were taken.

It was then close to sunset, but, although the presence of this Turkish outpost seemed to disprove the report of evacua-

¹¹ Maj-Gen. C. L. Gregory, C.B., C.M.G., p.s.c. In Australia, as exchange officer, 1910/11; commanded 11th (Secunderabad) Cav Bde, 1916/18 and 1918/19, 5th Aust. L.H. Bde, June-Aug., 1918, 5th Cav. Div. 1919. Officer of Indian Regular Army, b. Callan, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, 22 Aug., 1870.

¹² Brig-Gen. A. D'A. King, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Royal Horse Arty. Commanded Desert Mtd. Corps Artillery, 1916/18. Officer of British Regular Army, of London; b. Woolwich, Eng., 28 May, 1862.

tion, King decided to push into the town. When within about a mile and a half of Haifa, the cars came under shrapnel fire from a light battery astride the road, only a thousand yards ahead. Some of the tires on the armoured cars were punctured, and King's touring-car was destroyed by a direct hit. A retreat was at once ordered; but the narrow metalled track, flanked by deep drains, made turning difficult. As the guns opened, brisk rifle-fire also broke out at close range from olive-trees on the lower slopes of Mount Carmel; but after an exciting twenty minutes the column was withdrawn, with slight casualties. Next day Chauvel ordered Macandrew to capture Haifa with the 5th Cavalry Division, and the horsemen, after being held up for a few hours by shells and machine-gun fire, galloped into the town. Several Turks were killed by the Indians in the streets, and 135 prisoners and a few guns, including two naval pieces on Carmel, were captured. Simultaneously the 13th Cavalry Brigade rode into Acre, a few miles to the north, where, without fighting, they took 150 prisoners and two guns.

On the morning of September 23rd, therefore, Chauvel held the plain from Haifa to Beisan. The Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies were destroyed, few enemy troops remained between Nazareth and Damascus, and the way was also open for an easterly blow at Deraa. Chauvel's horses, after the great journeys of the 19th and 20th, had enjoyed comparative rest. The area occupied was rich in fresh water, and the threshing-floors of the natives had supplied a welcome addition to the horsefeed. Transport was working smoothly, and the men, if sleepless and tired, were well-fed and still very fit. The total casualties to the three mounted divisions up to this did not exceed a few score. All ranks were excited at the splendour of the Commander-in-Chief's achievement, and were eager for opportunity to exploit it to the full.

CHAPTER XLII

EAST OF JORDAN

ON the 19th, 20th, and 21st of September the Fourth Turkish Army east of Jordan maintained strong pressure against Chaytor. But it then became clear to its commander that his position was precarious, and that Chauvel's divisions on Esdraelon were certain to strike for his communications at Deraa, or further north at Damascus. Equally certain, also, was it that the Arabs, emboldened by the Turkish disaster, would display greater raiding activity and resolution. The cautious and wavering tribesmen from Maan to the north would now be encouraged to declare openly for the Hejaz cause, and the dour, aloof Druses of the Hauran and the Lebanons might at any time show themselves unmistakably hostile. In clean open fighting the Turks scorned the Arabs; but they were always fearful of the day when, if they should be overthrown by the British, the murderous tribesmen would prey like vultures on their broken ranks.

Therefore, when the Fourth Army commander learned of the complete collapse and loss of the two armies west of the Jordan, and of the menace to his communications with the north, he sought to break away from Chaytor, fall back on Es Salt and Amman, and then march for Damascus. During Chaytor's defence of the valley and the preparations for an advance, the area was still divided into two sectors. Ryrie, with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, held the line of the Jordan from the Dead Sea to the Auja bridgehead, both inclusive. Additional bridgeheads had been established at Henu and Makhadet Hajla, and these were held by detachments of the Indians. The 6th Light Horse Regiment and two battalions of the Indian brigade occupied Ghoraniye; the 5th Light Horse Regiment and one battalion of Indians were east of the river at Auja. The 7th Light Horse Regiment was at Kasr Yehud. Meldrum with the New Zealand Brigade, the two battalions of the British West Indians, and the two Jewish battalions, carried the line from Auja bridgehead across the Mellahah and Abu Tellul defences

into the hills. Cox's 1st Light Horse Brigade was in reserve north of Jericho.

Under his orders from the Commander-in-Chief, Chaytor's first concern was the defence of the valley. But he was to be vigilant, and ready at any moment to take the offensive. By demonstration and pressure he was to "prevent the enemy withdrawing troops to reinforce other parts of the line or concentrate against the XX Corps"; to use every endeavour to protect the right flank of the XX Corps when it advanced; and, if the Turks reduced their strength in the Jordan valley, he was to advance to the bridge at Jisr ed Damieh, and be ready to move east across the Jordan on Es Salt and Amman, where he was to co-operate with the Arabs. Here, as on the west of the river, the aims of the Commander-in-Chief were achieved to a degree rare in military history.

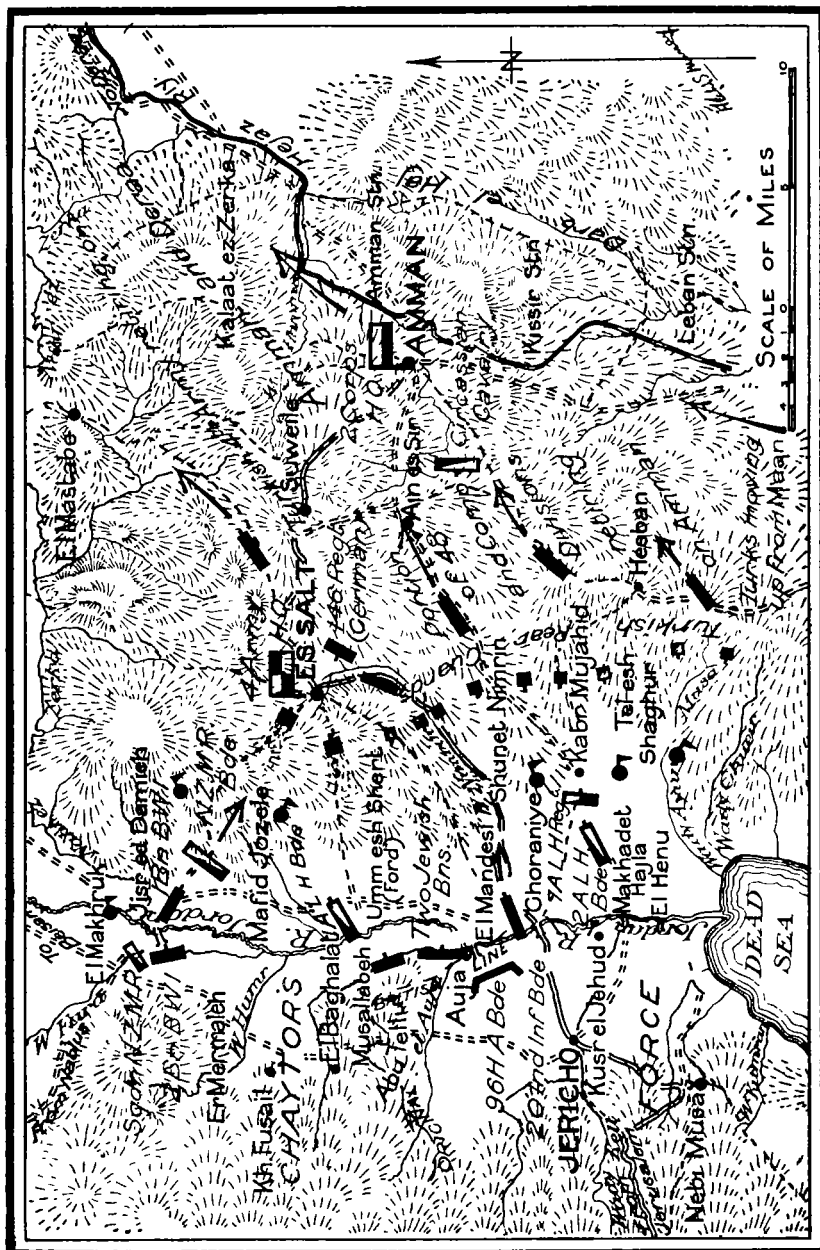
On the nights of the 17th and 18th Chaytor's patrols were unusually active on both sides of the Jordan, and shots were freely exchanged. On the 17th, while the 5th Regiment was probing the enemy about the foot-hills east of the river, Major Bolingbroke (the second-in-command) and a party of men came under rifle and machine-gun fire at short range. Bolingbroke was shot in the face, and lost the sight of one eye; one trooper was killed, one wounded, and one reported missing. On the 19th Fuller led out the 5th and 6th Light Horse Regiments and one battalion of the Patialas, supported by the 2nd Australian Machine-Gun Squadron, on a vigorous demonstration against Kabr Mujahid. This activity east of the river, carried boldly up to the enemy's defences, played an important part in deceiving him. At the same time Meldrum was equally aggressive on his western sector; "Grant Hill," Baghalat, and the trenches opposite the Mellahah defences were closely reconnoitred, and the enemy's anxiety as to an offensive was disclosed by his heavy rifle and machine-gun fire and sustained artillery barrage. A long-range gun (variously known as "Jericho Jane" and "Nimrin Nellie") located in the Wady Nimrin about the foot-hills, which had been active for some weeks, was now directed alternately on Jericho and on the tents of Chaytor's headquarters, situated about two miles north of the village. Its fire was accurate and embarrassing, but the casualties which it inflicted were trifling.

The British West Indians had been in Palestine for a considerable time; but it was only when they proceeded to the valley in late summer that they were for the first time put into the battle-line. Their fighting abilities were deemed very slender; among the white troops the term "B.W.I." was jestingly applied to units which had not shone in operations; and the shortage of men alone compelled their employment in Chaytor's Force. But these British blacks, making light of the heat and discomfort, at once won respect by the gay enthusiasm with which they went into their posts and trenches, and by their keenness for a smack at the Turks. When on the afternoon of the 19th Meldrum ordered the 2nd Battalion to occupy a height south of Bakr Ridge, the West Indians advanced with admirable dash to the position, and dug in and held on under heavy shell-fire. At dawn on the following morning they rushed Bakr Ridge with the bayonet, fighting with a resolution which won the warmest tributes from the critical Anzacs. The 1st Battalion, with more fierce bayonet work, carried Grant Hill and Baghalat and made them safe, and a few hours later the 2nd Battalion seized "Chalk Ridge." Then came the first essay of the Jews, who moved out from the Mellahah posts against the opposing trenches. It was felt that the fighting spirit shown by these battalions should be some sound indication of the capacity of their race to hold Palestine in the future against the traditional and inevitable aggression of the Arabs from east of Jordan. For this reason their employment in Chaytor's Force was looked upon with keen interest and sympathy. As they moved from their posts they were opposed by machine-gun and rifle fire, and achieved little; neither here nor in the subsequent fighting did they disclose military promise; and they suffered by contrast with both the pugnacious West Indians and the gallant Patialas.

On the night of the 20th the resistance to Chaytor was still strong all round his position, especially east of the river. But the news of success on Sharon and Samaria made imperative an advance to Jisr ed Damieh, in order to cut off the enemy's retreat in that quarter. On the morning of the 21st, the Turks were still firm in their trenches covering the Wady Mellahah, but further west the Aucklands of the New Zealand Brigade, advancing rapidly up the old Roman road, drove them from

Khurbet Fusail and Tel Sh Edh Dhiab, and pushed patrols further north and east towards Jisr ed Damieh and Mafid Jozele. As a result of the collapse further west, the Turks on the foot-hills were now weakening, but succeeded in establishing a reserve line from Meteil edh Dhib to Er Mermaleh, where they held up the further progress of the New Zealanders towards Damieh. At the same time their guns east of the river became very active against the bridge-heads, and the regiments of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade found the foot-hills still stoutly held.

The collapse came on the morning of the 22nd. An hour before dawn the Jews, discovering that the enemy was withdrawing from the trenches in front of Mellahah, pushed on and occupied Umm esh Shert about 5.30 a.m. At the same time Meldrum with his brigade and the two British West Indian battalions moved in strength on the left, with orders to seize Jisr ed Damieh. Riding in the dark, the Auckland Regiment was astride of the Nablus-Damieh road at 3.30 a.m. The Wellingtons pushed on, seized Tel el Mazar an hour later, and came upon a column of Turks trailing down the road towards the crossing. These exhausted and dispirited fugitives from the calamity upon Samaria offered no resistance to the confident mounted advance of the New Zealanders, and were speedily ridden down and collected. El Makhruk, where there was an extensive enemy dump, was seized without opposition, and the Wellingtons and Aucklands were soon in possession of 724 prisoners (including the commander of the 53rd Turkish Division), seventy vehicles, and large quantities of tibbin, barley and peas, and other material. A spirited fight ensued for the possession of the bridge at Damieh. While it was still dark, Colonel McCarroll, commanding the Aucklands, pushed a squadron in towards the bridge. Apparently they cut across a considerable column of Turks flying from the west, and, after capturing a number of stragglers, were held up by a cavalry outpost. Driving this in, they reached the edge of the high ground looking down upon the bridge, but at daylight they were strongly counter-attacked by superior numbers and compelled to give ground. The enemy was then seen to be digging in and bringing up reinforcements, and McCarroll decided at once to attack.



CHAYTOR'S ADVANCE ON ES SALT AND AMMAN, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 1918.

While the Ayrshire Battery did good shooting on the concentrating enemy, McCarroll—now reinforced by a squadron of the Canterbury and one company of the British West Indians—formed a crescent-shaped line about the bridge some 500 yards from the enemy. With a few troops and two machine-guns on the north to give covering fire, the little force then advanced with the bayonet, rapidly converged on the Turks, brushed them from their ground, and gained the bridge. "The advance of the British West Indians," said McCarroll in his report, "was particularly keen and workmanlike. They dashed down the hill in great style." One troop of the Canterbury, galloping in on the right, outflanked the enemy and secured many prisoners. The bridge was undamaged.

Only a miracle of good fortune could now save the Fourth Army from destruction, and this fact was as clear to the enemy as it was to Allenby and his lieutenants. To offer further resistance to Chaytor was but to reduce the already slender prospect of escape, and the withdrawal on the night of the 22nd was in reality a flight. When the Turks, leaving only rear-guards, crept away from the foot-hills north and south of Shunet Nimrin, and further north along the river, they marched hurriedly for Amman. They knew that the Hejaz line had been broken behind them by the Arabs at Deraa; still they hoped blindly for an escape by railway. To march by road to Damascus before Chauvel could cross the Jordan and intercept them, with the Arabs prowling and thrusting on their flanks, was a prospect which must have dismayed the stoutest spirits among them. On the defensive ground at Amman, also, they might hope for a time to resist (as they had done so successfully five months before) the onslaught of the Anzacs, and so give the 5,000 or 6,000 Turks at Maan time to join the Fourth Army. But their plight was desperate at best.

The capture of Jisr ed Damieh and the advance of the Jews to Umm esh Shert had cleared the west bank of the enemy except for a small force opposite Mafid Jozele. During the same day Cox's brigade, supported by the Jews and a battalion of the British West Indians, moved from Khurbet Fusail, and drove these Turks in towards the Jordan. The broken ground favoured the enemy, and there were numerous sharp little fights, in one of which Major Dick, of the 3rd

Light Horse Regiment, was wounded. At dark the enemy still covered the bridge at Jozele. His line on the east side now ran from Tel esh Shaghur in the south, through Kabr Mujahid and Shunet Nimrin, thence across the valley to Red Hill, and northwards through a position covering Mafid Jozele to the mud-hills east of the Damieh bridge. Shortly before midnight Chaytor received information of the general withdrawal of the Turks, and ordered his whole force to be in readiness for an advance in the early morning. In the south Ryrie with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade was to attack Kabr Mujahid and Tel er Rame, with one squadron directed on Shunet Nimrin; the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade was to march on Shunet Nimrin, with "Patterson's Column" (the two Jewish battalions under Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Patterson) in support at the Auja bridgehead. Cox with the 1st Light Horse Brigade was to force the Jordan opposite Mafid Jozele, and sweep the enemy back into the foot-hills; while Meldrum, leaving a squadron of his New Zealanders and a battalion of the British West Indians to hold Jisr ed Damieh, was to ride as rapidly as possible for Es Salt, followed by the balance of the British West Indians. If Shunet Nimrin should be occupied, it was to be vigorously bombarded. All wheels were to travel by the Shunet Nimrin-Es Salt track.

Before dawn on the morning of the 23rd Chaytor's Force advanced in strength along the line from Makhadet Hajla in the south to Jisr ed Damieh in the north. The enemy's rear-guards, after but feeble opposition, fled up the tracks to Gilead. By 4.30 a.m. the 7th Light Horse Regiment of Ryrie's brigade was in possession of Kabr Mujahid, which was found evacuated, and then advanced on Tel er Rame. The foot-hills were clear, except for scattered parties of enemy cavalry, and by nightfall Ryrie was climbing with his brigade up the Ain es Sir track to the plateau. Cox, fording the river at Umm esh Shert, rapidly crossed the plain and marched on Es Salt by the Arseniyet route; the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade reached Shunet Nimrin without being opposed, and took the main road to Es Salt. In the north the New Zealanders, after crossing the bridge at Damieh, were checked by a machine-gun post behind wire-entanglements stretched across the road leading to the foot-hills, but this was quickly

outflanked and rushed by the Canterburys. Climbing the hills in single file, Meldrum's brigade seized Es Salt at 7 o'clock in the evening. The Turks showed no disposition to stand and fight, and, when overtaken by the horsemen, readily surrendered. During the day the New Zealanders captured 312 Turks and Germans, three guns, and two machine-guns. The two Jewish battalions, exhausted by their work in the clay-hills, slowly followed the Indians, and took no further part in the operations; but the British West Indians, marching with spirit close behind the New Zealanders, reached Es Salt, and were ready to advance to Amman.

Ryrie's track was so rough and narrow that the enemy, by the explosion of a few mines, was able to make it impassable even for horsemen, and the brigade was checked for some hours during the night. But Ain es Sir was secured before noon on the 24th, and an outpost-line established from there to Ain Hemar, close to the Amman road in the north. The enemy fired a few shells, but made no serious effort to check the light horsemen. Earlier in the day the New Zealanders, followed by Cox's brigade, marched to Suweile. With the exception of one battalion of the Jews, which remained at Shunet Nimrin, and the detachment at Jisr ed Damieh, Chaytor now had all his troops on the tableland, based on Es Salt, and was ready for the advance on Amman. During the night a party of the Aucklands, by a fine ride in the dark, blew up at Kalaat ez Zerka the railway leading north from Amman, and so temporarily blocked the escape of the enemy. At 6 a.m. on the 25th the New Zealanders and Ryrie's brigade moved on Amman, with Cox's brigade in close support; at the same time a battalion of the British West Indians marched to Suweile. The Anzacs, with bitter memories of their fighting at Amman earlier in the year, were keen to engage and adjust the score; but Chaytor, conscious of the nature of the ground, was not disposed to take risks. He ordered his mounted brigades to probe the position, and, if it should be lightly held, to press in; but, if the enemy was strong, they were to await the arrival of the 20th Indian Brigade and the British West Indians.

About 8 a.m. the New Zealanders advanced from the north-west, with their right on the Es Salt road, and

the 2nd Light Horse Brigade from the west; while Cox, close up, watched the country to the north. Mountain guns supported the attack. The New Zealanders and Ryrie's men had been engaged in the previous fighting, and were animated by friendly but sharp rivalry for the capture of the town. Moving eagerly, the New Zealanders were checked by about 200 Turkish riflemen on a ridge to the north-west of the position, and were briskly shelled by two batteries of light guns. Ryrie advanced with the 5th Regiment on the right flank of the New Zealanders; then came the 7th astride of the Ain es Sir-Amman road, with the 6th in reserve. Cameron with his Queenslanders was arrested by strong detached posts of riflemen, supported by machine-gunners.

The Australian troop-leadership was superb. Ordered to clean up the outposts as rapidly as possible, the Queenslanders used their horses with an effect which was remarkable against an enemy defending himself on prepared ground. Lieutenant Byrnes, with less than twenty men, galloped half-a-mile under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire up to a redoubt, flung themselves from their horses, and rushed upon the Turks with the bayonet. Confused by the audacity of the advance, the Turks shot indifferently, and, when assailed with the steel, at once surrendered. Three officers, forty-four other ranks, two field-guns, and two machine-guns fell into the hands of the Australians. At the same time Lieutenant A. Currie,¹ a young officer with a distinguished fighting record, advanced with his troop dismounted across a long stretch of exposed ground, and under severe punishment, against another little redoubt. When the light horsemen were about eighty yards from the position, the enemy raised the white flag; but, as Currie and his men moved forward to take the surrender, the Turks re-opened fire at close range. Currie and all his men except two fell wounded, Currie mortally. Nevertheless Sergeant Patrick Kelly² with two men, one of them wounded, went on and seized the redoubt with thirty-three prisoners.

¹ Lieut. A. Currie, M.M. 5th L.H. Regt. Station overseer; b. Bute, Scotland, 1888. Died of wounds, 25 Sept., 1918.

² S.-S.-M. P. J. Kelly, D.C.M. 5th L.H. Regt. Bushman; b. Ipswich, Q'land, 1890.

On the right the men of the 7th under Richardson were making good progress round the flank of the enemy's resistance. Lieutenant Finlay, with the screen of the advanced squadron, rushed an enemy outpost in gallant style, and captured a mountain gun, two machine-guns, and fifty prisoners. The sudden change to the keen air of the upland, after the intense heat of the Jordan, was already bringing on much recurrence of malaria. On the previous day Majors Bird and H. I. Johnson³ had been evacuated sick, and Richardson was the only officer of field rank left with his regiment. The light horse, however, was always especially rich in leadership, and the young officers now exploited their opportunity with singular efficiency.

As the objective was approached, the machine-gun fire became intense, and the pace slackened. Shortly before 11 a.m., however, one of the British aeroplanes dropped a message to say that the Turks were evacuating the trenches about the town, and the attack was redoubled. Chaytor, in the belief that success would be followed by a general collapse, ordered the Canterbury Mounted Rifles to gallop the enemy redoubts opposed to them. But the ground was broken and deceptive; the Canterburys in their ride were checked by a steep cliff, and found that the only tracks leading towards the enemy were effectively blocked by machine-gun fire. Then for two hours the advance went on slowly; but all the time the riflemen of the two brigades, with the 1st Australian Light Horse Regiment co-operating with Meldrum on the left, were creeping steadily forward and improving their ground. Then the 3rd Light Horse Regiment was also sent in on the left, and the assault became general. The 7th Regiment on the right had worked round as far as the Wady Amman, so that the line ran across the area over which the Camel Brigade, the Londoners, and the 2nd Light Horse Brigade had advanced in the previous assault. Although checked by machine-gun fire in the broken ground of the wadys, and enfiladed on the right from the Circassian village of Ain Amman, Richardson's men made steady progress. A daring reconnaissance by Lieutenant C. E. Stanley⁴ revealed a

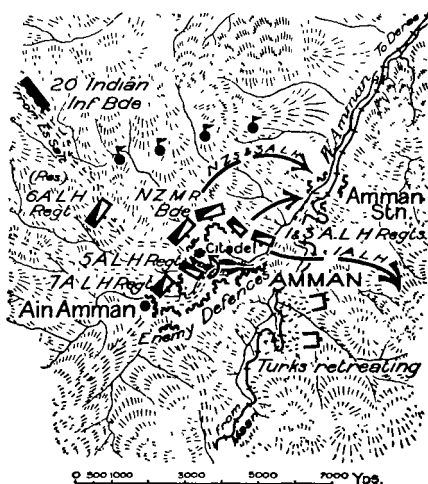
³ Col. H. I. Johnson; 7th L.H. Regt. Clerk; of Sydney, N.S.W., b. Macdonaldtown, Sydney, 1 June, 1884.

⁴ Capt. C. E. Stanley, M.C. 7th L.H. Regt. Overseer, b. Urana, N.S.W., 1888.

patch of "dead" ground within about eighty yards of the enemy's main line of resistance; and Stanley, with Captain L. L. Williams,⁵ led a little party, only thirty-five strong, across this in a dash at the trenches. The Turks, taken by surprise, refused to meet the bayonet, and nine officers and ninety-seven other ranks, with seven machine-guns, surrendered. Not an Australian was hit. This was the decisive incident in the assault. It not only smashed the opposition to the 7th, but eased the resistance to the 5th on the left, and Cameron's men struck boldly for the town.

At the same time, the New Zealanders, with the 1st and 3rd Light Horse Regiments on their left, were rapidly closing in from the north-west. Machine-guns in and about the old citadel had been a serious obstacle;

but the Canterburys, seizing a hill immediately in front of it, dominated and reduced its fire. About 1.30 p.m. the leading squadron of the 5th Light Horse, under Major Boyd, relieved by the advance of the 7th Regiment on its right and the New Zealanders on its left, crossed the Wady Amman and rushed into the streets of the village. The



Turkish resistance, already wavering, collapsed on the appearance of the Queenslanders. The citadel was assailed by the New Zealanders from the west and a troop of the 5th Light Horse, under Lieutenant Byrnes, from the rear, and was speedily reduced, the Queenslanders taking two guns. Simultaneously the New Zealanders with the 3rd Light Horse

⁵ Maj. L. L. Williams, M.C. 7th L.H. Regt. Overseer; of Warren, N.S.W.: b. St. Leonards, Sydney, N.S.W., 5 Dec., 1893.

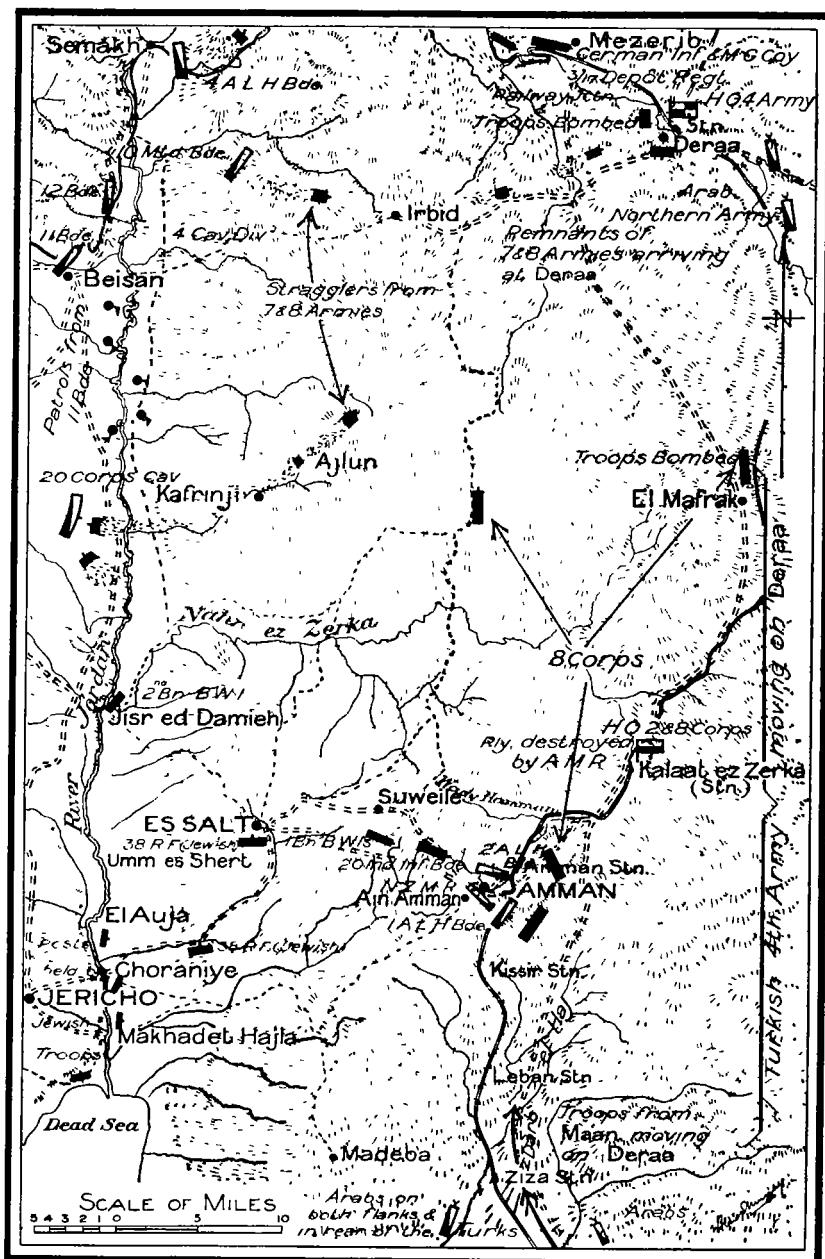
Regiment pushed on and occupied Amman railway station; while the 1st, working wide on the south, cut off the retreat of the force and took many prisoners. Some 2,360 Turks, Germans, and Austrians were captured round the village, together with six guns and many machine-guns. Nearly all belonged to the Fourth Army, and were in excellent fighting trim and strong in all arms, particularly in machine-guns. They had occupied prepared positions on ground naturally ideal for defence; and their weak resistance to the Anzac force, which was inferior in numbers and supported by only three mountain batteries, could only be explained by their knowledge of the fate of the Seventh and Eighth Armies, and the conviction that their whole cause was lost.

With Amman in his hands, Chaytor prepared for the destruction of the Turkish force—some 5,000 to 6,000 strong—which had for some months been defending Maan against the Arabs, 120 miles to the south. This body was in no immediate danger of destruction by the Arabs. The real fighting strength of the Hejaz army with Emir Feisal, Colonel Lawrence, and other British officers—together with the Arab “regulars,” guns, and armoured cars—were already about Deraa, in the north. But the Turks could not remain at Maan without supplies, and must certainly retreat northwards. In their almost hopeless plight, they had three possible lines of march. They could move north along the railway to Amman; in an endeavour to avoid Chaytor they could make a *détour* to the east, marching by the Darb el Haj, the old Pilgrims’ Road; or they might in desperation travel north-west across Gilead, and then either reach the Jordan valley or endeavour to follow the plateau, passing between Amman and Es Salt. To make their route as long and their march as slow as possible, Chaytor sent a detachment of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade to cut the railway some miles south of Amman. At the same time he ordered Cox to seize the water to the north-east at the Wady el Hammam, and so make the Darb el Haj route impracticable. He then ordered his reserves at Shunet Nimrin, Es Salt, and Suweile to prepare defences; Ryrie was to watch the country between the Hejaz railway and Naaur. On the 26th a squadron of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment captured a hundred hostile Arabs towards

the north, and, pushing on, entered Ez Zerka, where the Australians found ninety-five sick and wounded Turks and a 4.2-inch gun. Bell's men were held up by a superior Turkish force south of the Wady Hammam. These were successfully engaged on the 27th, and after a spirited little action two squadrons of the 3rd and one squadron of the 1st—admirably handled by Bell, and assisted by machine-gun fire from a British airman—simultaneously outflanked the enemy and assailed him in front. Thirteen officers and 440 other ranks, with three machine-guns, were captured, the water in the wady was secured, and the route by the east closed to the Turks from Maan.

Proceeding southwards along the railway on the 27th, a detachment of the 7th Light Horse Regiment met Turks near Leban, and learned from a prisoner that the Maan force, to the number of about 6,000, was marching north towards El Kastal, on the railway, sixteen miles south of Amman. Early in the following morning the enemy were reported by British airmen to have reached Ziza, a few miles south of Kastal, where they hastily dug a ring of earthworks. Soon after daylight a resourceful young pilot dropped a message into the Turkish camp, telling the commander that Amman with all the water to the north was held by Chaytor, that resistance was useless, and that if he did not surrender his force he would be heavily bombed from the air that evening. No response being made, Cameron, with two squadrons of his Queenslanders of the 5th, was pushed south to probe the enemy. Entering into negotiation with the Turks, he discovered the position to be complicated by the presence of a great host of Arabs of the Beni Sakr tribe, who were demonstrating with their rifles on the flanks of the enemy force. After their withdrawal from Maan the Turks had marched north to Ziza, with the picturesque tribesmen, burning to strike and plunder, but fearful of risk, prowling like jackals around them. Riding their mean-looking but spirited Arab ponies, they galloped in wide circles about the fugitive force, uttering wild shouts, firing their rifles into the air, and threatening each hapless straggler with pillage and murder. All this was clear to the Turkish commander, Ali Bey Wahaby, and he told Cameron that, while he was prepared

Map No. 43



CAPTURE OF AMMAN BY CHAYTOR'S FORCE, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

to surrender to a British force strong enough to defend his disarmed men against the Arabs, he could not lay down his arms and trust his men to the protection of a handful of light horsemen.

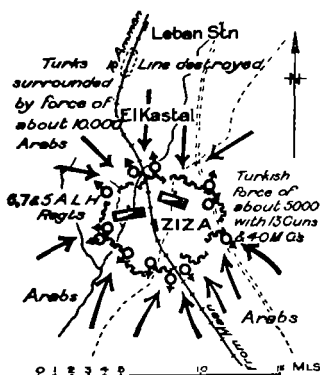
Meanwhile arrangements had been made for a strong force of airmen to bomb the Turks in the evening, and under the circumstances Cameron was naturally anxious to prevent the raid. On the ride south his signallers had repaired the broken wires of the telegraph line which followed the railway, and he was therefore able to discuss the curious situation directly with Colonel Browne, Chaytor's chief staff officer. Cameron urged that his little body should be at once reinforced, and that the bombing raid should be cancelled. Browne, however, was unable for some time to obtain touch with the airmen's headquarters, and Cameron therefore sent a number of horsemen into the Turkish camp to lay out ground signals to the airmen. The Turkish commander, when told that the raid would probably take place, showed no concern "It is," he said, "the will of God."

Chaytor, on learning of the situation, had moved promptly. After ordering Ryrie to join Cameron with all available troops, he drove down in a motor-car in advance of Ryrie's horsemen, and found Cameron's men watching the Turks from a distance. The Turkish commander, not impressed by the capacity of the few hundred light horsemen to protect him against 10,000 tribesmen, still refused to surrender. He expressed contempt for the Arabs, and even suggested to Chaytor that the Australians should stand clear while his trusty Turks demolished or routed them. That suggestion might in other circumstances have appealed to Chaytor, who was strong in his respect for the Turk and his scorn for the Arab, but it was impossible at the time, and the New Zealand leader, for once baffled, withdrew and left the situation to Ryrie.

Ryrie, when he received orders to move, had only the 7th Regiment available; but within thirty-five minutes he was on the march. Ten miles were covered at the trot and canter, and then—on a further message from Cameron that the situation at Ziza was critical—the pack-horses were left behind and the pace increased to the gallop. Ryrie joined Cameron

just before dark. "The 5th Regiment," wrote Richardson afterwards, "were concentrated, waiting reinforcements, while the Turks in their trenches were standing to arms holding off the Arabs with shell and machine-gun fire. The vulture appearance of the Arabs, who were willing that we should do the fighting and they the looting, will not readily be forgotten."

On Ryrie's arrival many of the chiefs at once crowded about him, urging him to attack and promising him bold co-operation. But the old Australian campaigner knew the fighting quality of his faint-hearted allies. He shared with the Turks the fear that, if they gave up their arms, his weak force might not be able to guard them against the Arabs. He therefore took the bold decision, but the only one open to him, to join forces with the Turks for the night and trust for developments in the morning. After advising the Turks of his intention, and ordering two of the sheikhs to accompany him, he led his two regiments at the gallop through the ring of Arabs into the heart of the Turkish position. He then told the Turks that they were to retain their arms and continue to hold their trenches against the tribesmen, while the light horsemen would stand by in support. At the same time he impressed upon the two Arab sheikhs that, if their men attacked in the night, they themselves would immediately be shot. The sheikhs sent out messengers to inform their followers of this threat, and the Turks and Australians proceeded, after years of bitter fighting, to bivouac together. They gathered about the same fires, exchanging their food, making chappaties together, and by many signs expressing reciprocal respect and admiration. The Australians, although outnumbered eight to one, had no concern for their safety, and the confidence with which they moved about the armed lines was a tribute to the honour of the Turks. Perhaps in all



their campaigning the light horsemen were never so richly entertained. The Turks, demoralised by the swift and complete overthrow of their fortunes, and disconcerted by the presence of the Australians, still feared massacre by the Arabs; all night they stood to arms, and engaged in bursts of machine-gun and rifle fire. The light horsemen, revelling in the strange situation, could be heard cheering on their activities. "Go on, Jacko," they would shout, "give it to the blighters"—and then indulge in shouts of laughter, cut short by the splutter of the machine-guns and the crackle of the rifles. What was grim tragedy to the Turks was farce to the Australians.

The Arabs showed no disposition to close, and soon after dawn Ryrie was able to assure the Turkish leader that additional troops were marching down from Amman to guard his men after their surrender. The New Zealand Brigade arrived at 8 o'clock; and the Turks, with the exception of a few hundred who were employed to assist the escort, laid down their arms and were marched to Amman. The anger and disgust of the Arabs was boundless. Insensible to chivalry, and instinctively cruel, they claimed the Turks and their booty to deal with in their own fashion. The prisoners numbered about 5,000, and the trophies included thirteen field and mountain guns, more than thirty machine-guns, a great quantity of ammunition, one large railway train, and three engines.

In this dramatic and picturesque fashion ended Chaytor's fine campaign east of Jordan. In nine days his force had captured 10,300 prisoners and 57 guns, 132 machine-guns, 11 railway engines and 106 trucks, and a great quantity of material—including wireless-sets, motor-lorries and other vehicles, and ammunition. His casualties were slight. Three officers and twenty-four other ranks were killed, ten officers and ninety-five other ranks wounded, and seven men posted missing—a total of 139.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE ADVANCE TO DAMASCUS

MEANWHILE Chauvel, breaking north and east from the Esdraelon plain, was exploiting the splendid initial successes. If at the outset Allenby had Damascus and Aleppo as his objectives, he did not share his plans with his corps commanders. He had said nothing to Chauvel, when he moved on September 19th, of operations beyond the seizing of the Esdraelon plain and Nazareth. Perhaps he was careful, knowing all the chances of war, to keep his intentions concerning Damascus and Aleppo to himself, so that if he failed to get beyond the Beisan-Haifa line, he should not be open to the reproach of achieving only a partial success.

But on September 22nd he visited Chauvel at Megiddo and reviewed the situation at first hand. He and Chauvel were agreed that the three days' operations had far exceeded their hopes. They had expected the enveloping movement to succeed, but had contemplated heavy fighting at both Jenin and Beisan, and would not have been surprised if considerable Turkish forces had broken through the cavalry, escaped east and north, and established a strong resistance to any further advance towards Damascus. The destruction, moral and material, worked by the airmen, had been far greater than Allenby had expected. Nor had he believed it possible that his mounted troops, despite all their dash, could have accomplished what had been done by Wilson's brigade at Jenin. When Chauvel told him that scarcely a Turk had crossed the Esdraelon plain or the river near Beisan, he for the first time mentioned the northern ride which was to conquer Syria, seize the Baghdad railway at Aleppo, and so bring to a sudden end the campaign in Mesopotamia. "What about Damascus?" he abruptly asked Chauvel; and the Australian, who never wasted his words, replied: "Rather."

Allenby at the time said no more; but the occupation of Haifa and Acre was then decided upon, as well as an advance to the Sea of Galilee at Tiberias and Semakh, a railway village



GENERAL CHANTOR WITH ALI BFY WAHABY

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to face p 728



face p 729

TURKISH PRISONERS CAPTURED AT AMMAN

Just War Museum (Official Photo No B90

at the southern end of the lake. This advance would give Allenby the line Tiberias-Nazareth-Acre, which he had foreshadowed in his despatches to the War Office at the end of 1917. With Haifa and Acre in his hands, Chauvel directed Hodgson with the Australian Mounted Division to seize Tiberias and Semakh. After the capture of the 8,000 prisoners by the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade at Jenin, Hodgson's command passed a few days of relative inactivity. The 3rd and 4th Brigades patrolled the plain between Macandrew's 5th Division about El Afule and Barrow's 4th at Beisan, and picked up parties of broken Turks coming from the southern hills. But these were glad to surrender, and there was no fighting. Water and horsefeed were plentiful, supplies were arriving regularly under the master hand of Colonel Stansfield, and the brigades were ready for fresh enterprises. The trophies at Jenin included a few thousand bottles of sweet sparkling German wine, discovered in a large cave beside the aerodrome. A light horse guard was placed upon this cellar; nevertheless, for some miles around, there was for a day or two a broad sunny smile upon the dusty, unshaven faces of the Australians.

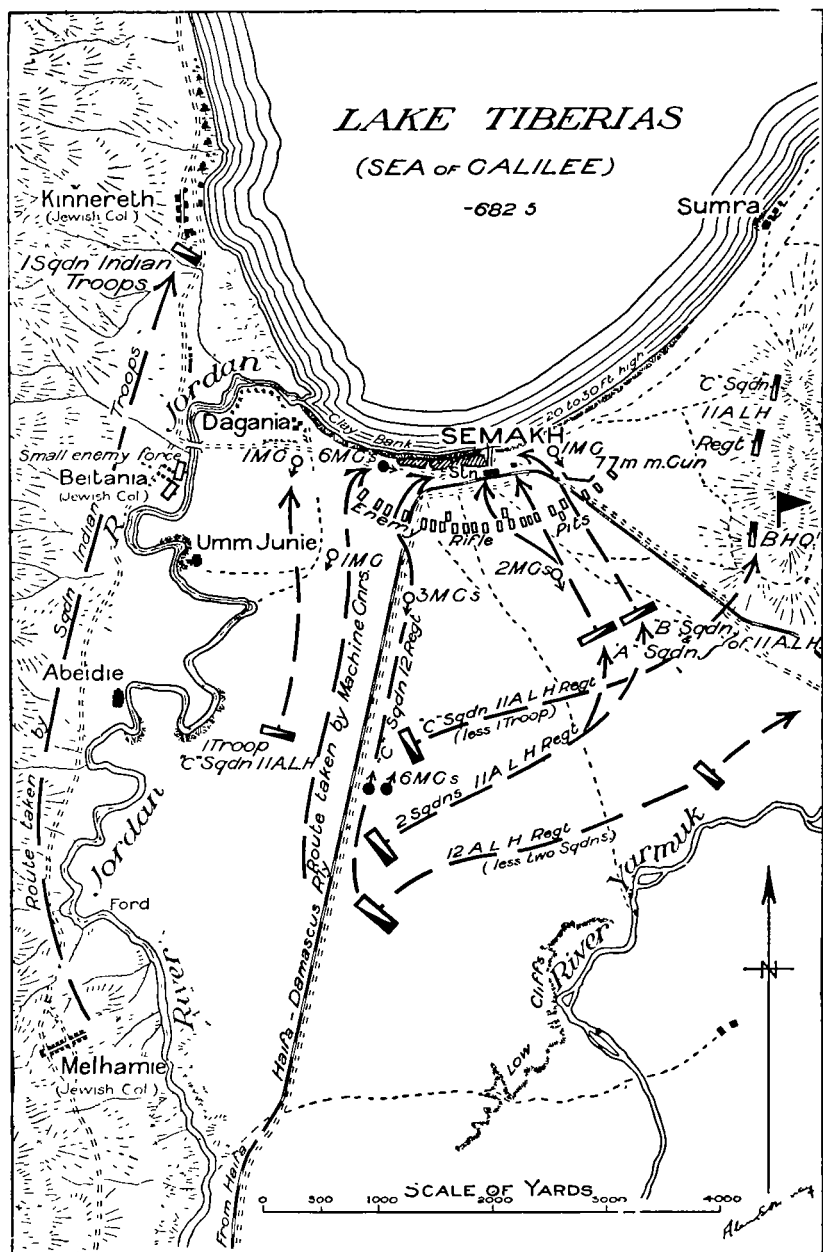
It was a season of many fine individual adventures. Colonel Todd, of the 10th, a sound soldier of strong personality, whose admirers in Palestine included far more than Australian troops, was in hospital at Port Said when the operations began. Severely wounded at the Second Battle of Gaza, his health was afterwards indifferent, and at this time his condition was giving anxiety to the medical officers. But he refused to remain in hospital, found a friend among the airmen, flew to Jenin, and joined his regiment there. He led his men to Damascus and beyond; but the strain was excessive, and his death at Luxor soon after the Armistice was the price which he paid for devotion to duty. On the morning after the capture of Jenin, a British armoured car, probing cautiously up the road leading towards Nablus, was surprised to meet a little car of the Australian Y.M.C.A., the driver of which had pushed through across Samaria in advance of Onslow's brigade and the infantry, bringing cigarettes and other luxuries for the troops upon Esdraelon.

On the 22nd Onslow's brigade reached Jenin, and

Wilson moved to El Afule to relieve the 5th Cavalry Division for its attack upon Haifa. The 8th Light Horse Regiment (under McLaurin) marched up to Nazareth, where Major Willsallen, of the 7th Light Horse Regiment—who was one of the gallopers attached to Chauvel for the operation—was acting as the first British military governor. By comparison with the dirty, cramped cities further south, Nazareth is stately, open, and fragrant. The Christian element of the population is dominant, and the little town, sincere in its joy and welcome, delighted the light horsemen. On the 24th Grant moved with the 4th Light Horse Brigade to El Afule; next morning, when it was reported from the air that the enemy was evacuating Semakh by motor-launch, he was ordered to march by Beisan upon the settlement there. Grant had for the undertaking only the 11th Regiment and one squadron of the 12th, but was promised that the 5th Light Horse Brigade would join him on the march. The brigade cleared Beisan on the afternoon of the 24th, and reached Jisr el Mejamie in the evening. Grant was ordered to attack Semakh at dawn on the following morning; if he found the position strongly held, it was left to his discretion to await the arrival of reinforcements.

The mean little mud village of Semakh stands on the southern edge of the Sea of Galilee, about a mile east of the outflow of the Jordan. The railway from Deraa, emerging from the great gorge of the Yarmuk, follows the Jordan plain in a north-westerly direction to Semakh, and then proceeds almost due south to Jisr es Saghir, where it crosses the river. Grant's information was that the enemy had a few hundred riflemen with some machine-guns about the new stone railway buildings; marching up from Jisr el Mejamie in the night, he decided to attack with the light force at his command without waiting for support. After the capture of the position he was to push round the western side of the lake upon Tiberias, in co-operation with Wilson's advance upon that place by the road from Nazareth.

The situation, as the little force advanced by night along the road from Mejamie, was obscure, and the 11th Regiment, while still in line of troop columns, was heavily fired upon with rifles and machine-guns at short range. Parsons, at the



THE ACTION AT SEMAKH, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

head of the 11th Regiment, was leading, with Major Costello, one of the squadron commanders, close behind. As the enemy fire opened, Costello shouted, "What orders, Colonel?" and Parsons on the instant replied, "Form line and charge the guns!" The men drew their swords as they moved into line, and within less than a minute Costello's squadron, with a second squadron under Major J. Loynes¹ in close support, was galloping hard in the darkness for the German machine-guns. A nest of these was speedily overrun; but fire had also opened from the railway buildings, which now showed up dimly in the moonlight about a mile away, and the two squadrons, wheeling at the gallop, accepted the challenge. It was a brave night gamble against a foe of unknown strength in a totally unknown position. Riding hard, the Australians closed swiftly on the position, although holes in the ground brought down a number of horses. When about 800 yards away, the enemy machine-gun fire from the stone buildings became effective, and several horses were crashed in their stride. Driving in their spurs, the leaders quickened the pace, but the fire had the effect of dividing the force.

The squadron under Loynes, a headstrong veteran of the South African campaign, approaching sixty years of age, swung to the left and headed for the native village, while Costello led his men round the railway station on the right. The horses showed up dark and clear in the moonlight, and the German machine-gunners continued to shoot down both them and their riders. Loynes, galloping into the village, swung to the right, and rode up under cover of some mud huts to within 150 yards of the main railway buildings. There he dismounted his men and led them on with the bayonet. Many Turks and Germans were concealed in railway trucks and carriages in the station; but the majority, including most of the machine-gunners, were in the buildings. Thence from the narrow windows they fired down at point-blank range upon the light horsemen as they charged. Many men were hit, and the position was critical, when Loynes found cover for his force in a drain with a slab fence beside it, only twenty yards from the station. At the same time the squadron galloping in from the east was held

¹ Maj. J. Loynes, D S O 11th L H Regt. Builder and contractor, of Ipswich, Q'land, b Birmingham, Eng, 23 Dec, 1862.

up by a flank-guard of the enemy about 200 yards from the buildings, and was also forced to dismount.

A hot fire-fight developed at revolver range, and for more than an hour the struggle was stationary. But some Australian machine-gunners, who with the remaining squadron had been ordered round to the east and south-east by Grant, made it impossible for the Germans to hold the windows of the buildings, and so substantially reduced the enemy's fire. At dawn the two squadrons rushed in on the concealed enemy. The fighting was bitter and bloody. The garrison, outnumbering the Australians by two to one, and made up largely of Germans, had, in addition to their extraordinary position and their machine-guns, an ample store of hand-grenades. They fought with exceptional boldness and stubbornness, their courage stimulated by an abundance of rum. But the Australians would not be denied. While the squadron on the east was fighting among earthworks and railway carriages, Loynes' men, rushing from their cover, battered in the doors of the main station building, and entering one by one, followed the Germans and Turks in the darkness from floor to floor and room to room with the bayonet. Captain W. F. Whitfield,² Captain H. J. Gee,³ and Lieutenant F. G. Farlow were killed in this fighting, but there was no pause in the struggle until the whole of the enemy force was destroyed or captured. The fight cost the Australians 3 officers and 11 other ranks killed, and 4 officers and 25 other ranks wounded, while the accuracy of the moonlight shooting against the opening gallop was shown in the loss of 61 horses killed and 27 wounded—about half the animals engaged. The enemy had 98 killed, and the Australians captured 23 officers and 341 other ranks, of whom about 150 were Germans.

While the outstanding feature of the stirring little fight was the dash of the light horse advance, followed by their steadiness under severe fire and their grim work with the bayonet, the machine-gunners under Major H. W. Harper⁴ also

² Capt. W. F. Whitfield, 11th L.H. Regt. Electrical engineer; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Sparbrook, Birmingham, Eng., 16 March, 1879. Killed in action, 25 Sept., 1918.

³ Capt. H. J. Gee, M.C. 11th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Brisbane, Q'land, b. Oxford, Eng., 2 June, 1877. Killed in action, 25 Sept., 1918.

⁴ Maj. H. W. Harper, 4th Aust. M.G. Sqdn. Farmer; b. Zeehan, Tas., 14 Jan., 1893.

excelled. Advancing at the gallop over ground swept by bullets, they came into action at the critical moment, and by their sure fire made the final charge possible. At one stage they were menaced from an enemy trench to the west of the village, but this opposition was impulsively galloped by a troop of light horsemen under Lieutenant G. R. Wilson,⁵ and forty-seven Turks and Germans and a machine-gun were captured. During the struggle a party of the enemy attempted to get away in a motor-boat on the lake, and others fled along the railway to the east. The motor-boat was caught by machine-gun and Hotchkiss fire, and burst into flames, only one man escaping destruction, while Hotchkiss fire cut down the fugitives along the railway. The Christian and Moslem dead were buried side by side on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, in one of the most impressive of all the cemeteries of the war.

While the 11th Regiment was fighting for Semakh, Cameron, with one squadron of the 12th Regiment, moved east into the Yarmuk Gorge with orders to reconnoitre up the railway towards Deraa. But the track was exceedingly rough, and small enemy forces soon arrested his progress. At the same time another squadron of the regiment crossed the Jordan and advanced along the road leading up the western side of the lake towards Tiberias.

Wilson, who on the night of the 24th was at Nazareth with the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade, had orders to reconnoitre Tiberias strongly on the morning of the 25th and to be prepared to capture the town on the 26th. At 5 o'clock on the morning of the 25th he sent Major Macpherson forward by the main road leading down from Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee, and a little later a battery of armoured cars followed in support. At the same time a troop of the 10th Light Horse Regiment was ordered to the summit of Mount Tabor, from which a clear view was obtained of Chauvel's troops from Beisan and Semakh to Haifa. This party being able to follow Macpherson's advance, and also to observe the squadron of the 12th moving along the shore

⁵ Lieut. G. R. Wilson, 11th L.H. Regt. Drover; of Adelaide, S. Aust.; b. Torrens-ville, S. Aust., 2 July, 1882.

of the lake from the south, advised Wilson by heliograph of all movements.

The country as usual teemed with biblical and historical associations. Macpherson's ride carried him along the old Roman road down past the stony uplands about Hattin, where "in crusading times the courage of Christendom was scorched to the heart, so as never to rally in all the east again." Where the heights of Hattin "offer neither shade nor springs," wrote George Adam Smith in his eloquent and illuminating *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, "the Crusaders, tempted, it is said, by some treachery, came forth to meet Saladin. A hot July night without water was followed by a burning day, to add to the horrors of which the enemy set fire to the scrub. The smoke swept the fevered Christians into a panic; knights choked in their hot armour; the blinded foot-soldiers, breaking their ranks, were ridden down in mobs by the Moslem cavalry; and although here and there groups of brave men fought sun and fire and sword, far on into the terrible afternoon, the defeat was utter." But now, more than 700 years later, Christian soldiers were to ride again over the parched field of Hattin, a simple, wholesome young manhood, conscious perhaps of no high Christian purpose, but single-thoughted in their voluntary duty to their race and country. They bore no relics of the True Cross to inflame their courage; they rode with no mail to protect their splendid young bodies; occasional blasphemy and scepticism marked their vivid speech. But no sworn and fiery Crusader of old carried a more terrible sword against the foe, and none rode nearer to the Christian precept to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before his God than these seemingly careless young light horsemen.

As Macpherson's men appeared on the high country some 1,500 feet above Tiberias, the enemy sent out patrols to sound the strength of the advance. The light horsemen, moving swiftly, cut off these Turks and captured them, and the garrison remained in ignorance of the situation. Macpherson, a gifted young soldier, then sent Lieutenant J. N. Stubbs^a with a troop and a Hotchkiss gun to a position on the

^a Lieut. J. N. Stubbs, M.C. 8th L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Dunedoo, N.S.W.;
b. Waerengaokuri, Gisborne, N.Z., 2 June, 1888.

shore of the lake, a few miles north-west of the town. Six enemy machine-guns, which had been located on the north of Tiberias, were engaged by the four armoured cars and the light horse patrols. Stubbs blocked and drove back a convoy and a party of infantry attempting to escape by the road along the lake. At 11.30 the squadron of the 12th, coming from the south, reached El Menarah—a point close to the ancient Roman baths and springs south-west of Tiberias—and Macpherson decided to attack without waiting for the 3rd Brigade to come up. The men of the 12th advanced mounted from the south-west, the armoured cars drove boldly down the steep winding road from the west, while Macpherson pushed in from the north-west. The enemy machine-gun position was galloped by one of the Victorian troops, the crews scattered, and the guns captured. Closing rapidly, the little force encountered but slight opposition, and entered the gloomy stone-built town about 3 p.m. One hundred and seventy-five Turks and twenty-five Germans surrendered, and the booty included a large quantity of stores and of motor- and horse-transport.

As soon as Wilson was advised of the success, he marched from Nazareth and reached Tiberias early on the following day. Patrols were then pushed up the lake past El Mejdel (Magdala, the birthplace of Mary Magdalene) to Tabghah, and on to the outskirts of Safed, which was found clear of the enemy. The slight resistance at Tiberias indicated that the enemy's rear-guard was weak and dispirited, and that the road to Damascus, now only seventy miles distant, was probably open. Since much sickness, including cholera, was prevalent in Tiberias, the Australians were at once withdrawn and camped along the shores of the lake and on the hills immediately behind. While they refreshed themselves and their horses by swimming in the sparkling waters of Galilee, each mind was actively building up the scene of 1,900 years ago, when Jesus with his disciples moved amidst the busy life of thriving Hellenized cities which then graced these now bare and deserted shores. During their stay by the lake two turbulent squalls came suddenly up, lashing the waters into foam, to be followed in a few minutes by a complete calm: and the men smiled, and pondered.



THE SCENE OF THE CHARGE AT SEMAKH.

Aust. War Museum Official Photo No. B284



LIGHT HORSE GRAVES AT SEMAKH

Aust. War Museum Official Photo No. B288

To face p. 730



3RD AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE MARCHING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE

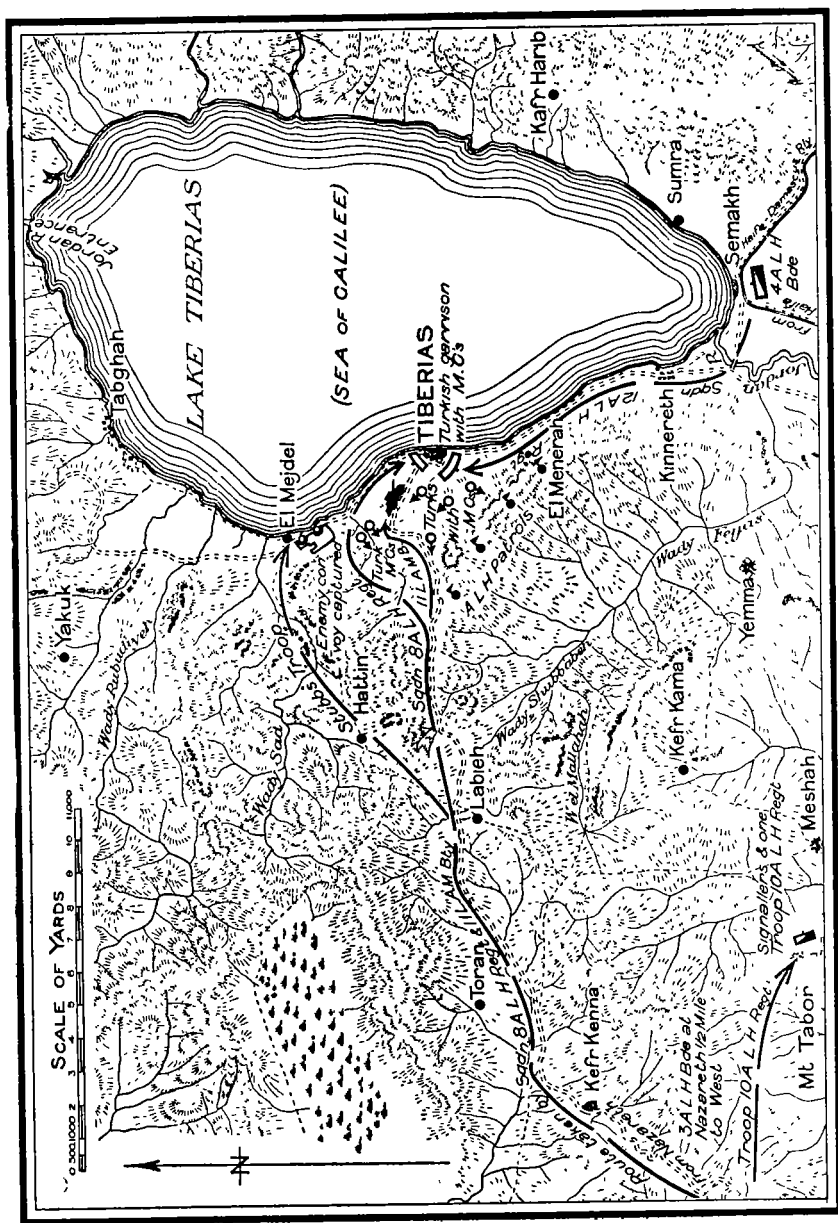
Aust War Museum Official Photo No B281A



THE BROKEN BRIDGE AT BENAT YAKUB

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B295

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THE ACTION AT TIBERIAS, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

Allenby on the morning of the 25th met Chauvel, Chetwode, and Bulfin in conference at Jenin, and Chauvel reported the capture of Semakh. Then for the first time Allenby announced definitely his intention to carry the advance to Damascus. The decision, however, was now inevitable, and his lieutenants listened without surprise. His plan was simple. With the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies destroyed and the Fourth Army in full retreat, no serious opposition was anticipated; the only doubt was whether British supply columns could move quickly enough to let Chauvel's divisions reach Damascus in time to cut off the retreat of the Fourth Army. From Lawrence at Deraa and from the airmen came information that some 20,000 or 30,000 troops of that army were now hastening north. The garrison at Deraa was still holding out; and it was feared that the tribesmen could not alone speedily reduce the garrison or hold up the general flight. It was, therefore, resolved to send Barrow east from Beisan to Deraa, with orders to intercept the Fourth Army and join up with the Arabs. He was to march by Irbid and Er Remte; if he headed off the Fourth Army, he was to endeavour to destroy it, and then march for Damascus by the old Pilgrims' Road. If the Turks escaped him at Deraa, he was to pursue and harass them as they fled north, and drive them into the arms of Chauvel's other two divisions at Damascus. He was given one day's start.

Hodgson was to march for Damascus by the direct route, followed closely by Macandrew, so that the full strength of the three divisions should appear simultaneously before the city. Speed and perfect co-operation were essential to complete success.

Meanwhile the Arabs under Lawrence and Feisal had continued their work about Deraa, but their usefulness had been restricted by the bombing activities of a number of German airmen. Influenced probably by the complete mastery of the British pilots west of the Jordan, and with a shrewd sense of the effect of bombing upon the Arabs, the enemy had established a temporary aerodrome at Deraa, and with a force of ten or eleven machines began to harass the Hejaz force—which then had its headquarters at Um es Surab.

The enterprise was immediately successful. On September 22nd, when an Australian pilot landed at Um es Surab with despatches from Allenby to Lawrence, he found the young Englishman deeply concerned about the condition of his men. The German bombs and machine-guns had struck a heavy blow at the nerves of the natives, who scattered in panic at the airmen's appearance, and were in danger of complete dissolution. Lawrence, therefore, sent an urgent appeal to Allenby for a force of British pilots to engage the Germans. The Commander-in-Chief instantly responded, and on the following morning three Bristol Fighters from the Australian Squadron—in the hands of Captain Ross Smith and Lieutenants G. C. Peters⁷ and E. S. Headlam,⁸ with Lieutenants E. A. Mustard,⁹ J. H. Traill,¹⁰ and W. H. Lilly as observers—flew over to the Arab encampment.

Before night the enemy air force at Deraa was out of action, and was not seen again during the campaign. One enemy machine was attacked, forced down, and burned by Ross Smith and Mustard as soon as they arrived. Later in the day Ross Smith and Mustard attacked three German machines single-handed, forced two down on the desert, and drove the third to the aerodrome at Deraa; Peters and Traill shot down another, killing both pilot and observer. The aerodrome was then effectively bombed and machine-gunned; a few days later the charred remains of a number of enemy aeroplanes were found by the cavalry. The Australians remained for some days with the Hejaz force, and Ross Smith flew over from Ramleh in the Handley-Page with supplies of petrol and food. The excitement and delight aroused in the Arabs by the dramatic destruction of the enemy's dreaded force, and by the arrival of the giant aeroplane, were boundless, and Lawrence declared afterwards that the dashing work of the Australians brought thousands of recruits to the green standard.

⁷ Maj. G. C. Peters, D.F.C. No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. School teacher; of Hobart, Tas.; b. Adelaide, S. Aust., 6 May, 1894.

⁸ Lieut. E. S. Headlam, No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Law student; b. Nant, Bothwell, Tas., 26 May, 1892.

⁹ Lieut. E. A. Mustard, D.F.C. No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Vic. Govt. Railways employee; of North Fitzroy, Melb., Vic.; b. Oakleigh, Melb., 21 Sept., 1893.

¹⁰ Lieut. J. H. Traill, D.F.C. No. 1 Sqdn., Aust. Flying Corps. Station hand; of Cassilis, N.S.W.; b. Bligh, N.S.W., 8 July, 1895.

On the 26th Macandrew moved from Acre and Haifa to Nazareth, and during the afternoon Barrow struck east across the ranges for Deraa. On the morning of the 27th the Australian Mounted Division moved northwards, heading for Jisr Benat Yakub (the bridge of the Daughters of Jacob), which lies two or three miles south of Lake Huleh, and fourteen miles from the camps in Galilee. The brief spell on the shores of the Sea of Galilee had refreshed both the men and their horses, and the thought of Damascus excited all ranks. The aim was to cross the Jordan on the morning of the 28th, to reach the vicinity of the Circassian village of El Kuneitra, fifteen miles further on, that evening, and to appear before Damascus on the morning of the 29th. With Onslow's 5th Brigade leading, the division streamed across the rich irrigated plain of Gennesaret, with its crude "watch towers" built of saplings and bushes from which the natives kept guard against robbers as in ancient days; then, climbing the hills, it passed through the Jewish settlement of Rosh Pina. There the 3rd Brigade moved to the front, and the force with flank-guards riding wide, paced down a long lane of fragrant eucalyptus trees and struck north-east for the bridge at Benat Yakub.

The stone bridge had been broken by the enemy, and Wilson received orders to reconnoitre north and south for fords. As his patrols approached the river, however, they met with smart fire from guns, machine-guns, and rifles. A strong rear-guard, well placed in the boulders and long grass on the slopes of the east bank of the river, dominated the crossing for a distance of two or three miles, and Wilson was halted until the 4th and 5th Brigades came up in support. The 3rd Brigade then explored the position between the bridge and the lake north of it, while the French regiment of Onslow's brigade pushed in against the bridge and the 4th and 14th Light Horse Regiments approached the river further south. As the troops crossed the crest and advanced down the steep slopes to the river, they were exposed at close range to the enemy. The supporting batteries of horse artillery experienced difficulty in finding the opposing gun and machine-gun positions, and,



THE SURRENDER OF KUNEIRA TO MAJOR-GENERAL H W HODGSON
COMMANDER OF THE AUSTRALIAN MOUNTED DIVISION (WHO IS SEEN ON
THE LEFT) (BRIGADIER-GENERAL GRANT IS ON THE RIGHT)

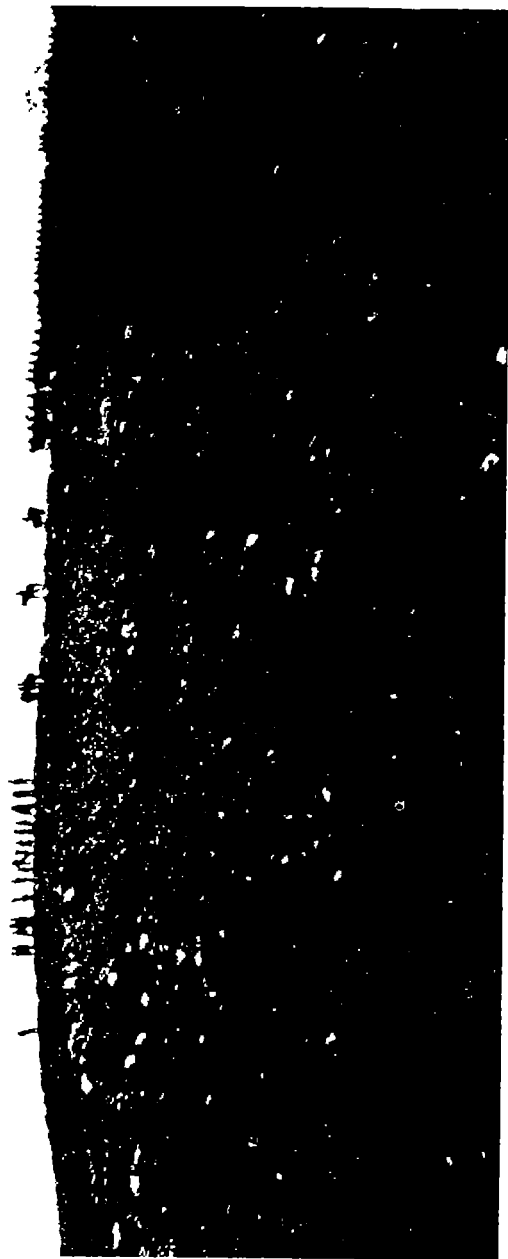
Aust War Museum Official Photo No B300



A HALT ON THE RIDE TO DAMASCUS

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B278

To face p 740



SQUADRONS OF THE 4TH AND 12TH AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE REGIMENTS IN READINESS FOR THE CHARGE AT KAURAK
Taken by Tpr. W. Morgan, lent by Lieut-Col. M. W. J. Bourke, 4th L H Regt
Aust War Museum Collection No B2023

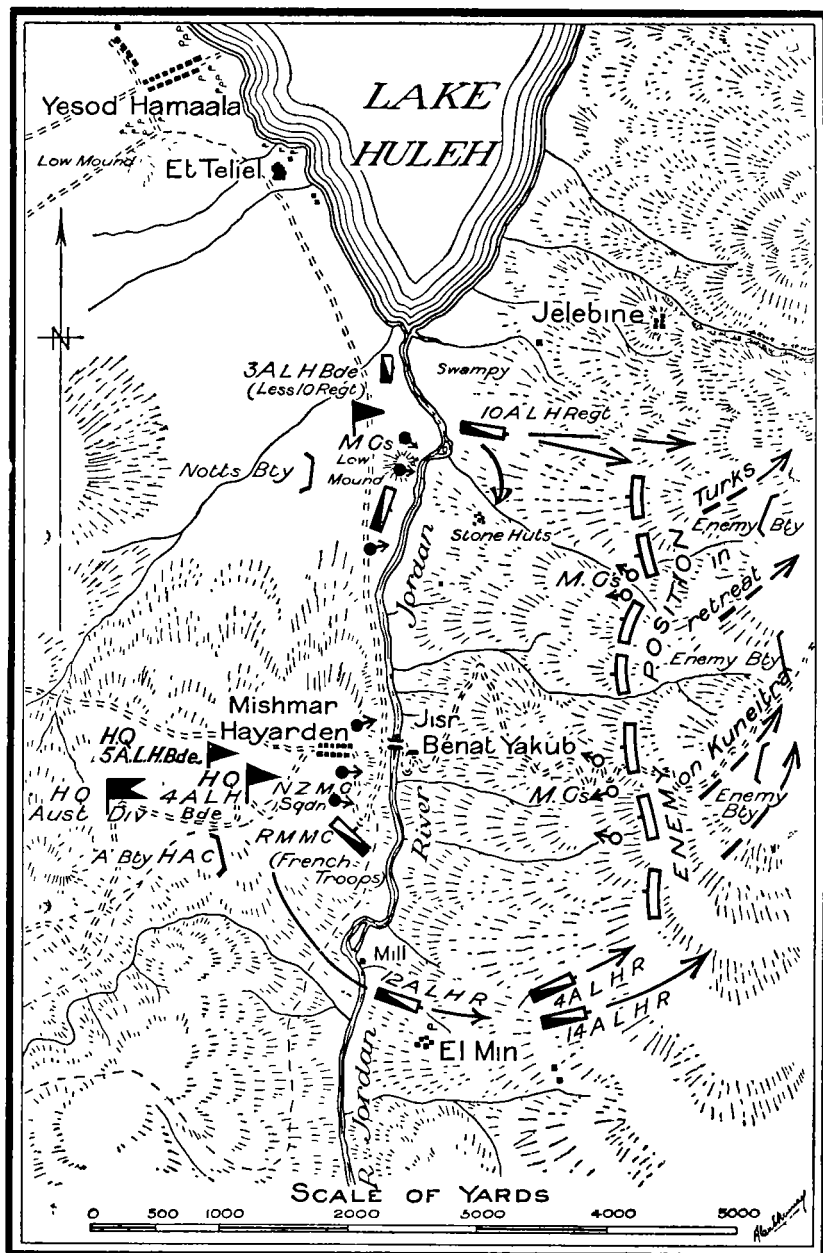
although some of these were demolished by admirable shooting, the advance was checked until late in the afternoon.

After leaving Lake Huleh, the Jordan tumbles noisily down over a bed of boulders. The banks, although not high, are steep, and, except at isolated spots, present a barrier secure against horsemen. Bouchier, with the 4th Light Horse Regiment, however, closely supported by the 14th under Langley, worked in slowly to a ford at El Min about two miles south of the bridge, wore down the enemy's fire, and scrambled across the stream, Langley following closely. The east bank was steep, and so broken with rocks that the advance was very slow, and it was not until 7 o'clock that the advance-guard reached Ed Dora on the enemy's left flank. Bouchier's aim was to envelop the Turks, but the harshness of the country made further progress impossible in the dark, and the regiment halted for the night.

Meanwhile to the north the 10th Light Horse Regiment had forded the river about half-a-mile from Lake Huleh under covering fire from machine-guns and the troops of the 8th and 9th. The 8th followed, and the two regiments struck in the darkness for Deir es Saras—except one squadron of the Western Australians, which moved south along the river to clear the enemy from the bridge. Groping their way through long grass and over boulders, the leading troops of the squadron under Lieutenant H. M. Macnee¹¹ blundered on to an enemy post, which opened on them with machine-gun and rifle fire at a range of a few yards. The ground was impossible for mounted work, but Macnee's men, slipping instantly from their saddles, and with Sergeant W. C. Martin¹² at their head, rushed on the flashes with their bayonets. The enemy stood and fought bravely, and in a hand-to-hand encounter the Australians lost a number of men. But the post was overwhelmed, yielding a trophy of twelve Germans and forty Turks, a field-gun, and a machine-gun. During the night the enemy withdrew his rear-guard in motor-lorries. It was now evident that he hoped, by the employment of a stout rear-guard consisting

¹¹ Lieut. H. M. Macnee, M.C., D.C.M. 10th L.H. Regt. Pearler; of Broome, W. Aust.; b Fitzroy, Melb., Vic., 14 Feb., 1887.

¹² Sgt. W. C. Martin, D.C.M. (No. 1340, 10th L.H. Regt.) Sleeper carter; b. Jarrahdale, W. Aust., 1891.



CROSSING OF THE JORDAN AT JISR BENAT YAKUB, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

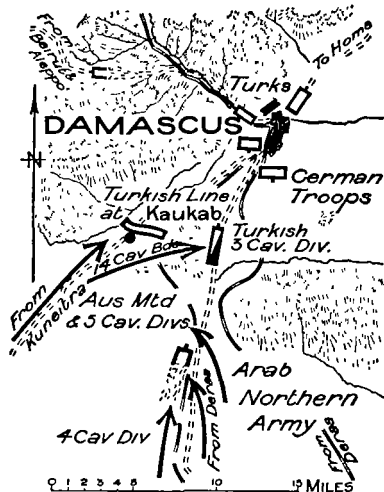
largely of German machine-gunners, made mobile by motor-lorries, to delay Chauvel's advance from the Jordan long enough to concentrate the remains of the Fourth Army before Damascus. If that could be done, he might reasonably expect to check Chauvel for at least a few days; if compelled to withdraw further, he might do so in good order. His rear-guards were fighting for the safety of 20,000 or 30,000 troops moving north from Deraa, and for huge quantities of military stores at Damascus.

The 8th and 10th Light Horse Regiments reached Deir es Saras before midnight, and Wilson with the rest of his brigade arrived at dawn. Soon afterwards three enemy aeroplanes passed over the troops and dropped a few bombs about the crossing at Jisr Benat Yakub; but so complete was British mastery in the air that these were the first German airmen seen by the Australians since the operations began. With the 8th Regiment (supported by six machine-guns) leading, the brigade advanced towards Kuneitra a few hours later and, obstructed only by a little sniping, entered the Circassian village at about 10 o'clock. The guns and all transport were delayed for some time at the Jordan, but a party of light horsemen improved the bed of the river by the removal of many boulders, and the crossing was at length effected. At the same time the Australian engineers repaired the bridge, and early in the afternoon it was open for wheels. By evening Hodgson had concentrated his division about Kuneitra, and Macandrew with the 5th Cavalry Division was only a few miles behind.

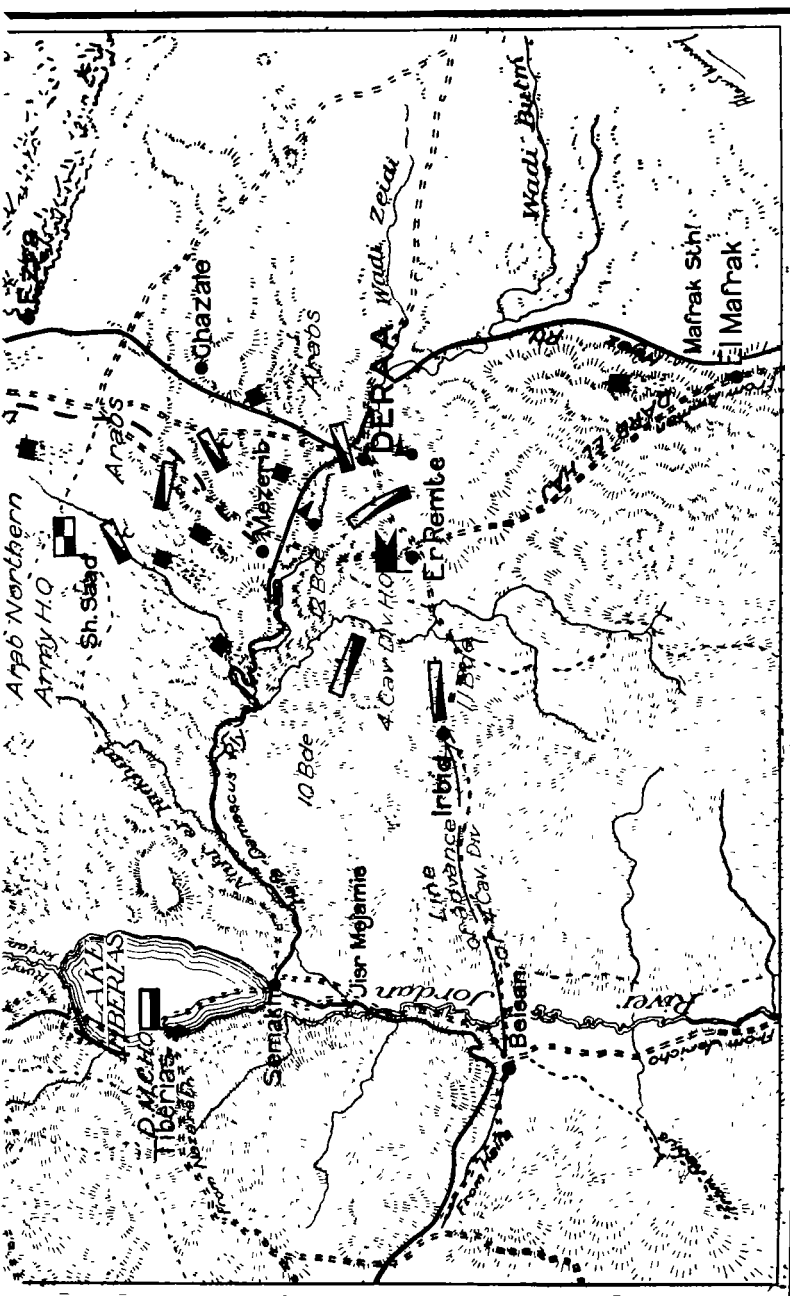
Meanwhile Barrow's march on Deraa had been slower than Chauvel had anticipated. The passage of the ranges led through many narrow defiles, and the division was held up by the enemy at Irbid and again at Er Remte. The Arab force under Feisal and Lawrence, after its raids upon the railway about Deraa on the 16th and 17th, had moved south and attacked the Turks at Mafrak as they marched up from the south, and, thrusting vigorously, compelled the abandonment of guns and transport. Too weak yet to force a general surrender, the Arabs then rode north and captured the railway stations at Ghazale and Ezra (between Deraa and Damascus), after which Deraa was evacuated. On the

28th Barrow, with the Hejaz troops on his right flank, advanced strongly in pursuit of the retreating Turks. The enemy's plight was deplorable. His troops had been marching for days on short rations, and had been harassed day and night by the elusive Arabs and bombed by the airmen. Their boots were worn through; footsore, hungry, dejected, and afflicted with dysentery, they limped on towards Damascus. Had it not been for the Arabs, the force would probably have surrendered. But every sick and broken Turk was urged on by an exaggerated fear of the exultant tribesmen, at whose hands he expected mutilation and death. And now, close at hand across the plain, Damascus with its clear waters, its fruits, and its promise of refuge took shape in the mind of the fugitives, and drew them forward. The host was still strong in machine-guns, manned by

trustworthy Germans, who, stalwartly guarding the flanks and rear, took the blows of the pursuit, and barred the attempts of the British officers to charge into them with the eager Indian Lancers. With their rear-guard safe against Barrow, the Turks, reduced as they were, had no difficulty in brushing aside the Arabs on their east flank, and the long column steadily approached its goal. Barrow, seeing that he could not overrun and capture the force alone, repeatedly asked Chauvel to detach a force which, striking north-east from the main road followed by Hodgson, might cut across the front of the Turks before they gained Damascus. But the delay at Jisr Benat Yakub made this for the time impracticable.



Kuneitra is a hungry little bluestone village on the edge of the Hauran, and it offered no supplies to the troops. But running water was plentiful; and, although many of the



ADVANCE ON DAMASCUS, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

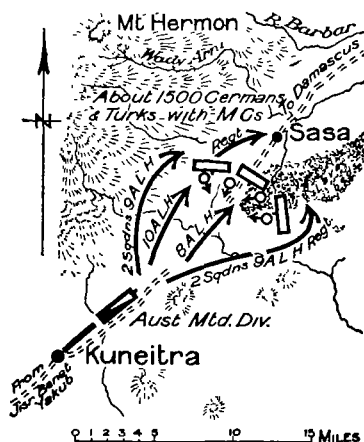
Australians were engaged during the night on outpost duty, the division as a whole was rested and refreshed by the pause. A reconnaissance by armoured cars on the morning of the 29th discovered the enemy, with two guns and a number of machine-guns, astride of the Damascus road on a strong ridge about four miles south of the walled village of Sasa. Hodgson's intention was to march that night upon Damascus, but Wilson, anticipating difficulty in dislodging the enemy in the darkness, suggested a daylight attack. The country on either side of the metalled track was broken with wide patches of lava formation and fissures, which made movement laboured and slow even in the daytime. Wilson feared that, if the advance should be confined to the road, the enemy with his machine-guns would impose a serious delay, but urged that he must be dislodged by a flanking movement by day. The original plan, however, was adhered to, and the 3rd Brigade (the advance-guard) did not march until 3 p.m.

Major Parsons, who was leading with a squadron of the 9th, was heavily fired upon by guns as he approached the enemy position, suffered a number of casualties, and was halted. Wilson at once pushed the balance of the 9th and also the 10th Regiment forward in support. But it was already dark, the ground had not been reconnoitred, and delay was inevitable. All attempts to move by the track were at once checked by the carefully registered fire of six machine-guns. Mounted movement off the road was impossible. Lieutenant-Colonel T. J. Daly¹² with two squadrons of the 9th was then sent to discover and outflank the enemy on the left, while Parsons moved out on the right. For some hours the light horsemen floundered over the rocks, but, although the 10th Regiment was also ordered out on the left, the advance was very slow. The enemy held the ground with about 300 Germans and 1,200 Turks, and, perched behind his rocks, could neither be troubled by fire nor reached with the bayonet. Hodgson, fretting at the check, urged more pressure; and at 2 a.m., when the flank attacks were beginning to dislodge the resistance, the 8th Regiment advanced close beside the road, located the

¹² Lt.-Col. T. J. Daly, D.S.O. Commanded 9th L.H. Regt., temply, 1918, and 8th L.H. Regt. 1918/19. Bank manager; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Coburg, Melb., Vic., 12 July, 1884.

machine-guns by their flashes, crept in and captured all six of them without suffering a single casualty. The Turks and Germans, served, as at the Jordan crossing, by motor-lorries, hastily retreated, pursued by the 10th Regiment.

About a mile south of Sasa another rear-guard action was attempted, but the Western Australians, leaving their horses, went in with the bayonet, and the stand was short-lived. During the pursuit two guns, two machine-guns, and many prisoners were taken by the 10th. But Wilson's brigade was now widely scattered, and the lead was taken by the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments. Grant, with the 11th Regiment of the 4th Brigade, had been held at Kuneitra for the defence of communications; the 4th and 12th, therefore, under Colonel Bouchier, and for the time being known as "Bouchier's Force," advanced towards Damascus, only forty miles away.



Between all brigades and regiments there was keen rivalry as to which should first penetrate the ancient city of so many romantic and dazzling associations, and Wilson and his men did not conceal their chagrin at losing the lead. Trotting through the disgusted troops of the 10th Regiment, Bouchier's men eagerly took up the running. For a few miles they were confined by rough country to the metalled road, and were sniped at by straggling parties of the sullen foe. But after they had cleared Sasa the brown plain opened out level and clear, and the leading squadron under Major Reid, spreading over the countryside, made the pace a "cracker." Everywhere bodies of Turks and Germans could be seen heading for Damascus, and the light horsemen broke up into many little parties and spurred down upon the wretched fugitives. In the long advance their spirit never burned more brightly than on this

wonderful morning of the day which was virtually to close the great campaign. The men, unshaven and dusty, thin from the ordeal of the Jordan, and with eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, rode with the bursting excitement of a throng of schoolboys. Their blood tingled with the sheer joy of their gallop to victory, and they laughed aloud as they thundered down on the terrified enemy. Caution went to the winds. With swords flashing in the early sunrise, little parties of three and four men raced shouting on bodies of Turks ten and twenty times their number. Lieutenant G. E. Bingham¹⁴ with his troop, working isolated on a flank, chopped boldly across the rear of a strong column, and compelled the surrender of 180 men, a field-gun, and several machine-guns. Other guns and vehicles were galloped down on the road, the teams swiftly shot, and the pursuit continued. Bouchier, following the road with Cameron of the 12th, had to ride hard to keep touch with his exuberant horsemen.

At the River Barbar—the ancient Pharpar, which with the Barada (Abana) makes up “the Waters of Damascus”—a halt was called; horses were watered, the men made a speedy breakfast, and the 3rd and 5th Light Horse Brigades came up in support.

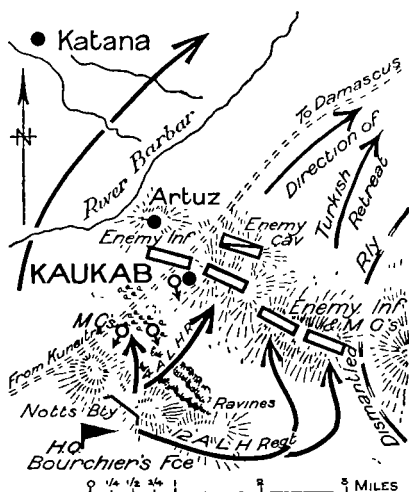
The exact position at Damascus was still obscure to Hodgson. He knew that his race against the Fourth Army was a close one, but he was as yet unaware whether the Turks had gained the city. In the early morning Bouchier's leading men sighted a column of troops and transport some six miles away across the plain, marching abreast with them north-westwards on Damascus; and Reid asked permission to gallop across and endeavour to cut it off. The Turks were obviously some thousands strong, and, triumphant as the Australians were, it was a risky enterprise for a few score horsemen. Bouchier therefore reported to Hodgson, who ordered him to remain on his front, and to steady the pace pending reinforcement. The 4th and 12th Regiments then moved more quietly, while the Turkish column, with cavalry on its left flank, headed across their front and took up a strong line covered by many machine-guns. The position

¹⁴ Lieut. G. E. Bingham, M.C. 4th L.H. Regt. Wool sampler; of Campbellfield, Vic.; b. Hawthorn, Melb., Vic., 23 June, 1894.

ran along high ridges on either side of the village of Kaukab (the legendary scene of St. Paul's conversion), and extended north-west across the plain towards Katana, through a series of posts among large plantations of trees. Bouchier moved forward to a ridge about 2,300 yards from the enemy, and prepared for a mounted assault. The little engagement which followed was reminiscent of fights of a century earlier. Between the opposing forces lay a wide stony valley, broken for some distance by two deep ravines. The enemy, though strong in machine-guns—which he used vigorously against Bouchier's patrols—was without artillery, and the gunners

of the Notts Battery and the "A" Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company were therefore able to advance to the top of the ridge and lay their guns on the enemy machine-guns over open sights. Shortly before 8 o'clock Hodgson, after conferring with Wilson, Onslow, and Bouchier, issued his orders. Bouchier with the 4th and 12th Regiments was to advance with the sword upon the Turkish position at Kaukab, while Onslow, moving by the west, was to ignore the enemy line, pass between Artuz and Katana, and seize Daraya and El Mezze.

The Frenchmen of Onslow's brigade, their grey horses showing prominently, struck in at once past the right flank of the enemy, and so menaced his rear, while the batteries freely shelled his machine-gun positions. Meanwhile the squadrons of the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments were lined up, with swords drawn, behind the crest of their ridge, restless for the coming charge. Soon after 11 a.m. Bouchier gave the signal, and the horsemen trotted over the





BARADA GORGE.

Israel Museum Official Photo No B1112

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DAMASCUS,

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B304

To face p 749

skyline, deployed into "artillery" formation, and went at the gallop down into the valley. The enemy machine-guns had immediately before been so active that heavy Australian losses seemed inevitable; but the Germans, evidently disturbed by the advance of the French regiment close past their right rear, and confused by the very accurate bombardment, had no stomach for a fight. With the 12th Regiment on the right, and the 4th riding at the centre of the position, the lines of horsemen raced across the flat and began to climb the hill, expecting each moment to be swept with machine-gun fire at close range. The affair, however, was bloodless. The Germans left their guns, not having fired a shot after the horsemen began their ride, and fled with the Turks towards Damascus. Twelve machine-guns and twenty-two prisoners were taken without any loss to the Australians.

Meanwhile Onslow's brigade had passed Daraya, the French regiment with two troops of the 14th Regiment keeping close to the foot-hills of the Anti-Lebanons, and the remainder of the 14th on the right skirting the edge of the great garden area of Damascus. Here the enemy made a brief stand; but Langley with the 14th cleverly outflanked him by sending a few troops through the gardens past the left of the Turkish line. The enemy was now utterly demoralised; as the advanced Australians opened fire across their rear, the force (5,000 or 6,000 in number) fell back in confusion towards the mouth of the Barada Gorge, and took the road to Beirut. But the Frenchmen, swinging into the hills on their left, gained the heights above the road and railway at a point north of Rabue, whence they shot down the head of the column. At the same time a handful of Australians of the 14th Light Horse Regiment under Major Oliver Hogue¹⁵ occupied a house at the entrance of the gorge, and poured galling fire at a few yards' range into the now distracted Turks. The host turned back in hopeless confusion, and, confronted by Langley's men—who were now astride the road and railway near the entrance to the pass—threw down

¹⁵ Maj. O. Hogue, 14th L.H. Regt. Journalist; of Glebe, Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Darlington, Sydney, 29 April, 1880. Died of illness, 3 March, 1919. Son of the late Hon. J. A. Hogue, M.L.A.

their arms and surrendered on level country slightly to the south-west. Four thousand prisoners and much booty were taken. This dashing piece of work was, however, only the beginning of the tragedy which the Turks were to suffer in the Barada Gorge.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE CAPTURE OF DAMASCUS

DAMASCUS, one of the oldest cities known to man, lies on the plain immediately east of the forbidding desert slopes of the eastern Lebanons. North and south, and for some miles to the east, stretches a rolling plain, which, although dry and dusty in the late summer, is favoured by enough rainfall to send forth rich crops and grasses in the winter and spring. Further east, across the marshes which absorb the waters of the Barada River, is the wide, sandy waste of the Arabian Desert, the home of the true migratory Arab. Unlike nearly all ancient cities, Damascus has all down the ages maintained its population and its wealth. Its fortunes have ebbed and flowed, its splendour has flamed and smouldered with the rise and fall of successive conquering empires; but the city has always endured as the home of a rich and numerous people.

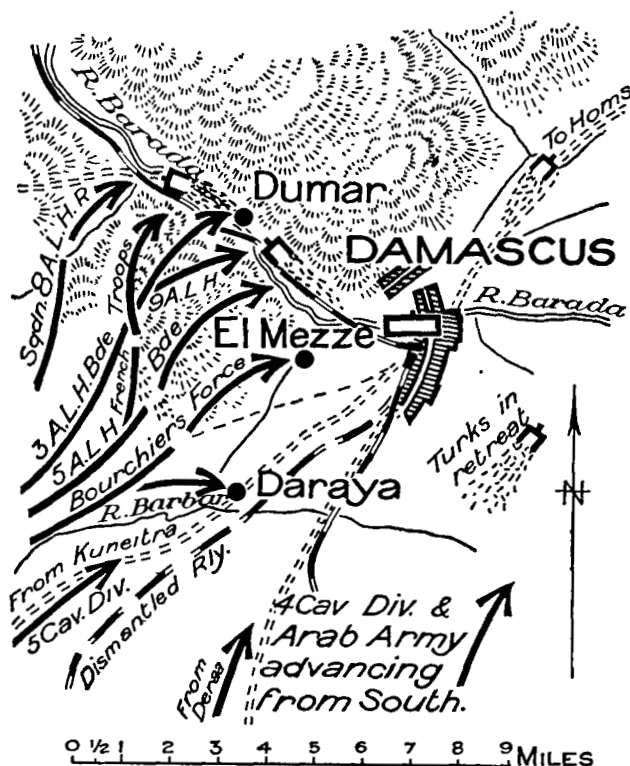
The reason of this permanence is simple. Damascus, while it has ever owed much of its prosperity to its trade with all the peoples of the East, and to the accidents of political fortune, is rich within itself. Nature intended this ancient haunt of men for an enduring homing-place. The torrential Barada River, fed by the ever-flowing springs of the Lebanons, bursts from its gorge at the very gates of the city and, over the rich but thirsty plain, creates and sustains a wide and prolific garden. Nowhere in the world is irrigated agriculture made so easy and profitable. The stream is directed into many channels at various levels as it descends to the plain; these, divided again into a thousand little currents, are led out over the strong soil, warm under the hot eastern sun; and the harvest is heavy and eternal.

Emerging from the Barada Gorge in the dust of summer, when the eastern Lebanons are dry and heated and the desert hillsides dazzle the eyes, the traveller comes suddenly on the great city set in a beautiful forest of orchards and plantations, brilliant with the vivid flowers of sub-tropical climes. But irrigation demands the absence of hills lending themselves to

defence; and Damascus, with all its easy wealth, built up by water, rich soil, and strong sunshine, has always been an open town to a resolute invader. Armies marching in from north and south and east have had the advantage of manœuvre and the choice of direction, and the escape of the beaten defenders has always been difficult. Four great roads lead out from the city. By the Gate of God the old Pilgrims' Road to Mecca strikes due south across the western fringe of the Hauran towards Deraa, and on to Mecca; the ancient caravan route to the Jordan, Judæa, and Egypt goes out south-west; westwards, by the Barada Gorge, road and railway lead through the eastern Lebanons into the plain of Baalbek and on across the western Lebanons to the seacoast at Beirut; north-east the road passes to Homs and Aleppo.

Chauvel's immediate purpose, as his divisions advanced from the Jordan and up the Pilgrims' Road further east, was to isolate the city by seizing the Barada Gorge and the northern route to Homs. This was the mission of the Australian Mounted Division, while Barrow and Macandrew, when the exits were closed, were to press into the city from the south. Before midday on the 30th, while Bouchier's regiments were galloping the resistance at Kaukab, Hodgson ordered Wilson to follow Onslow, cross the Barada Gorge, work over the foot-hills of the Lebanons north-west of Damascus, and straddle the road at Homs. The foot-hills beyond the Beirut road were known to be extremely rough; but it was felt that, if a possible track existed, the light horsemen would discover and ride it. About 3.30 p.m., while Onslow was engaged with the enemy south and south-west of the mouth of the gorge, Wilson directed his brigade to the left of the French regiment and, with the 9th and six machine-guns leading, reached the gorge about one mile south-west of the village of Dumar. The route was exceedingly steep, progress was slow, and already the day was closing. Scott met with stiff opposition as he endeavoured to descend into the gorge; the hills beyond presented no passage. Wilson was convinced that, if he persisted in carrying out his orders to work round Damascus, his brigade would become unduly scattered, and he would probably fail either to cut the road to Homs in time to prevent

a heavy withdrawal of troops and material from the city, or to intercept the troops of the Fourth Army.



The only alternative route was through Damascus itself. So far as Wilson knew, the city was still strongly held; but he correctly sensed the chaotic state of the enemy, and boldly decided that, as soon as his brigade was concentrated, he would take the risk of a short cut through the crowded streets of the enemy's stronghold. Meanwhile there was fighting immediately in view. As Scott and his men looked down on the narrow floor of the gorge, they saw it crowded with a great column of fugitive troops, transport, and railway trains moving towards them from Damascus. The situation was exceptional. The gorge, as it winds between the sheer desert

cliffs of the eastern buttress of the Lebanons, is not more than 100 yards in width. Along this confined passage, crossing and recrossing from side to side, tumbles the roaring Barada, and crowded along its banks run the road and railway. As the light horsemen, with their six machine-guns, Hotchkiss guns, and rifles, took up positions on the heights, they saw some hundreds of feet below them the massed and confused enemy troops making their escape, as they believed, to the Baalbek plain. At the same time, squadrons of Onslow's brigade, moving fast, had taken up a fresh position further west about Dumar, where under similar conditions they caught another column of fugitives. German machine-gunners, operating from the tops of motor-lorries and trains, defied the challenge to surrender, and all along the gorge the unequal issue was joined. The result was sheer slaughter. The light horsemen, firing with fearful accuracy, shot the column to a standstill and then to silence. For miles the bed of the gorge was a shambles of Turks and Germans, camels and horses and mules. Never in the campaign had the machine-gunners found such a target.

All night the Australians remained on their heights, firing occasional bursts from the machine-guns to ensure the blocking of the road. But the precaution was unnecessary; no enemy troops entered the pass after the fall of darkness. About 9 p.m., two troops of the 9th, under Lieutenants Hargrave and Masson, patrolled through the village of Dumar, and found it clear except for stragglers and wounded, and Wilson prepared for his ride through Damascus in the early morning.

During the 30th, while the Australians were closing with so much spirit upon the city, the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions and the Arabs were also actively raiding the Fourth Turkish Army. Barrow, although advancing rapidly, was unable alone to overwhelm the retreating enemy, and the Arabs were content to thrust at his right flank and pick up stragglers. At 9 a.m. a column about 2,000 strong was reported by an airman to be marching north from Kiswe towards Damascus, and Chauvel ordered Macandrew, who was following the Australian Mounted Division from Kuneitra, to detach a brigade and endeavour to cut it off. Brigadier-General G. V. Clarke with the 14th Brigade at once struck north-east; after trotting and

cantering for some miles, the Indians and yeomanry galloped into the Turks with lance and sword, cut the column in two, destroyed or captured all the leading portion, and drove the remainder westward towards Macandrew's other brigades, when they were speedily surrounded and forced to surrender. Among the prisoners taken by the 14th Brigade was the commander and staff of the 3rd Turkish Cavalry Division, and all that remained of his troops—an inglorious end to a force which had never throughout the war accepted a mounted engagement with Chauvel's horsemen. Later in the day Macandrew's brigades engaged large bodies of the enemy on the road south of Kiswe, where about 1,000 prisoners were taken. Two troops of the Gloucesters attempted to seize the powerful enemy wireless plant at Kadem, on the outskirts of Damascus; the station was blown up as the British galloped in, but they killed fifteen members of the demolition party with the sword before being driven off by a strong force of Germans.

That night Hodgson had his headquarters on high ground overlooking Damascus from the south-west; Macandrew was at Kaukab, a few miles behind; late at night the leading brigade of Barrow's division reached Khan Denun, thirteen miles south of the city. The Arabs were still on his right; but riding on through the night, eager to join in the entry, they were close to the city in the early morning.

Within Damascus itself the Turkish power, after 400 years of corrupt misrule, was tottering to its fall. When the news of the disaster in western Palestine reached the great city, the position of the Turkish rulers became at once embarrassing and dangerous. Of the population of about 300,000, some 60,000 were Christian Syrians. The Turks were negligible in numbers; and, as everywhere else in Syria, Palestine, and Arabia, their unpopular rule had depended absolutely on their organised military power and the absence of fighting spirit in the subject peoples. But both Arabs and Christians were now aflame with the hope of liberation and national independence. The Arab despised the Christian; the Christian feared the Arab; but both aimed to overthrow the Turk. The Arabs looked to the victorious British advance to give them absolute dominion from the desert across to the Mediterranean

all the way up from the Hejaz to the Taurus; the Christians were confident that the triumph of British arms would give them either an independent state, which would include Damascus and modern Syria, or at least a generous measure of independence under the protectorate of one of the great Western Christian powers. As Chauvel approached, the common antagonism of Christian and Moslem towards the Turk grew bolder. Where they had been servile, they were now offensive; they refused supplies, balked transport, and openly insulted Turks and Germans in the streets. Nor was their hostility, especially that of the Arabs, without organisation and capable direction. For many months the agents of the Hejaz had been very active in all Syria, and particularly in Damascus. Under the guidance of Lawrence, sedition had been widely and surely sown; each centre had its Arab committee and a strong following sworn to rise and act at the declared moment. Many months earlier Lawrence himself had been in the Damascus area, and, at a spot only two or three miles from the city, had interviewed Arab notables high in the Turkish administrative service.

When the crash came, the Turks found themselves friendless. Even their trusted servants in high places were secretly and actively working for their destruction. As the disaster to their armies became complete, and the situation at Damascus grew acute, the old antagonism between Germans and the Turks ripened into active hostility. While Chauvel's divisions were spurring up from the south—at a time when the only chance of saving the remnants of the Fourth Army and of covering Damascus temporarily, so as to ensure an orderly withdrawal, lay in complete co-operation between the German and Turkish leaders—those leaders had broken off their relationship, and their men were in open and bloody quarrel. The two races brawled about the division of transport available for their escape, and numbers of men were killed in the fighting. With hostile tumult in the streets and bazaars, and sedition rife in the offices of the Government, the infamous alliance split asunder in a sordid demonstration of recrimination and blows.

Imperial powers that govern and exploit subject peoples by the might of the sword, untempered by consideration for the

welfare of the governed, may well ponder upon those closing days of Turkish rule in Damascus. The Crescent was without a single stalwart friend; even those who had been richly rewarded for their services basely deserted to the victorious standard of England. The defence of the city was in the hands of Ali Riza Pasha el Rikabi, a Baghdad Arab of good family, educated at the Turkish Military Academy, who had served his life in the Ottoman Army. When war was declared he held the rank of lieutenant-general, and for some time commanded an army corps against the British in Mesopotamia. After the Hejaz had revolted, however, Ali Riza was suspected of Arab sympathies. His powerful influence saved him from disgrace, and he was placed in command of the garrison at Damascus at a time when it was not anticipated that the city would be menaced during the war. On the approach of the British he was ordered by Djemal Pasha to guard the city until all the stores were removed, and was given troops for that purpose.

He entered with apparent keenness upon the work entrusted to him, and then, with his plans in his pocket, vanished from the city. On the following day, as Barrow was moving up from Deraa, his leading troops were surprised to meet a richly-clad and obviously distinguished personage, accompanied by a bodyguard, riding fearlessly to meet them. Ali Riza had come to hand over to Chauvel his plans for the defence. His identity and the truth of his statements were established beyond suspicion; and Barrow, although astonished at his visitor's perfidy, was not displeased to have the capture of Damascus made as swift and bloodless as possible. The information was at once sent to Chauvel, but its value was slight.

Djemal Pasha, on the retreat of his Fourth Army, had hastened to Damascus, where he laboured vainly to repair his broken fortunes. Fiercely jealous of the German staff, as he had always been, and hating in his narrow passionate mind every German soldier, it was ironical that in this dark hour his one slender chance of saving Damascus and a fragment of his army lay in the valour of the reliable German machine-gunners, who were everywhere sustaining heroic rear-guard actions. By the 30th Djemal, recognising that the

early loss of the city was inevitable, prepared to depart. At 4 p.m. he called a meeting of the notables at the Serai, intending to hand over to Shukri Pasha Ayoubi the military governorship of the city. Shukri was another Arab who had enjoyed a distinguished position under the Turks, and it was known that he was favourably regarded by Hussein of the Hejaz. Another notable in the city who had been nominally loyal to the Turks, but who was at the same time working for the Arabs and ambitiously watching his own interests, was Emir Said—a lineal descendant of that Abd-el-Kader whom the French had deported from Algeria to Syria on a liberal pension. Emir Said had been employed by the Turks to raise a force of Arabs in opposition to the Hejaz movement, but, although jealous of Emir Feisal, he had worked strongly against Turkey. A report was current that Djemal contemplated firing the city before its evacuation. It was probably without foundation, but both Shukri and Said believed that the violent Turk, in the bitterness of his overthrow, might be guilty of the attempt. Early in the afternoon, therefore, before the meeting arranged for the notables, they sought Djemal, told him that British horsemen were approaching the city, and warned him that, if he did not at once leave, his life would be in danger. At the same time they unfurled the green flag of the Hejaz at the Serai, and proclaimed Hussein King of Damascus. Djemal bowed sullenly to circumstances, and left the town by the road to Beirut some two hours before the track was closed by Onslow's brigade.

On the night of the 30th, therefore, when Chauvel's troops were lying close round the west and south of Damascus and the Arabs and Barrow were moving up on the south, Turkish rule had virtually ceased in the city. All night the streets and bazaars were in a tumult. Turks continued to straggle in, sick and footsore, from the south-east, and long columns of those who had the strength and the desire for further flight, and who were still under the influence of their officers, passed out of the city by the road to Homs and Aleppo. Other broken columns, driven by Barrow and the Arabs, skirted the city on the east and marched to strike the road further north. Excited crowds of the Arab populace thronged the streets.

carrying the Hejaz flag and firing rifles into the air, exulting in what they deemed their new-found nationalism, and threatening the expectant but fearful Christians. The state of the Christian minority was a peculiar one. All or nearly all that was—by Western standards—worthy in Damascus was theirs. Their brains and energy directed the city's manufactures and commerce; in their hands was the city's great wealth. While they had groaned under the oppression and corruption of the Turks—who all down the centuries had exploited their enterprise, their labour, and their thrift—still they had prospered and, sustained by their faith, had dreamed of their deliverance into Christian hands. Allenby's capture of Jerusalem had seemed to them the response of Providence to their centuries of prayer; the news of Chauvel's rushing approach was a miracle of Divine dispensation. From time to time during the war they had been disquieted by the boastful declaration of the Arabs that an Allied victory, if it came, would give Damascus into Arab hands. That such a pact existed between England and the Hejaz was for the Christians beyond belief. But now, on the night of 30th September, with the Hejaz flag floating at the Serai, and with the Arabs rejoicing in the bazaars, their long-awaited deliverance seemed only to menace them with a rule more odious and oppressive than that of the Turks. Consequently, while the Arabs danced and shouted and shot at the skies with their rifles, the Christians kept within their houses and waited with hopes and fears the coming of the British in the morning.

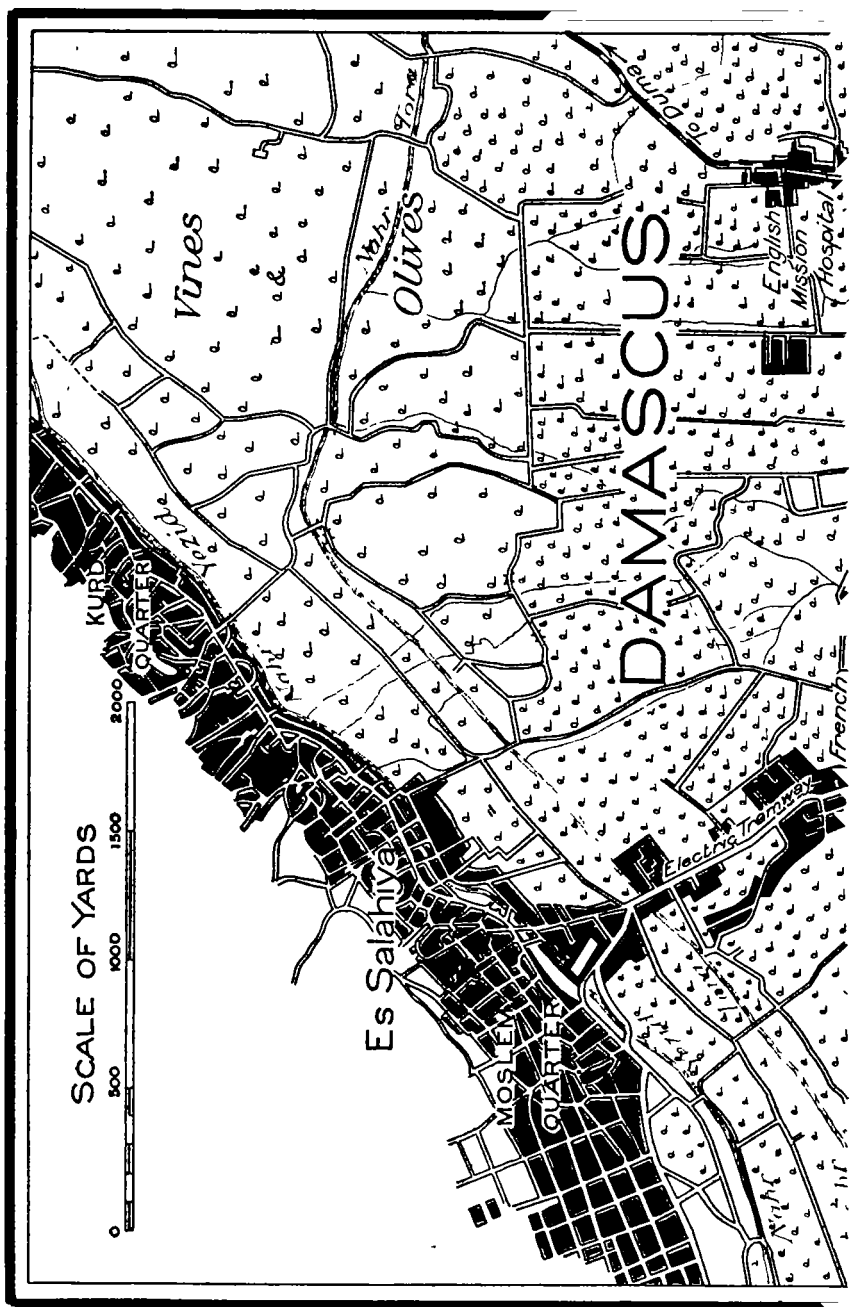
During the night Wilson had assembled his brigade on the high ground above the village of Dumar, at the western entrance to the Barada Gorge. At 5 a.m. he began his hazardous move through the heart of the city to reach the position he was ordered to occupy on the road to Homs. At that time he knew nothing of the action of Ayoubi and Said, but believed that Damascus was still in the hands of the Turks. He was aware that some thousands of enemy troops must be concentrated in the town, and in the circumstances his decision to attempt the passage of the narrow, crowded streets was a daring one; but he very properly staked success on the moral effect to be produced by his galloping horsemen

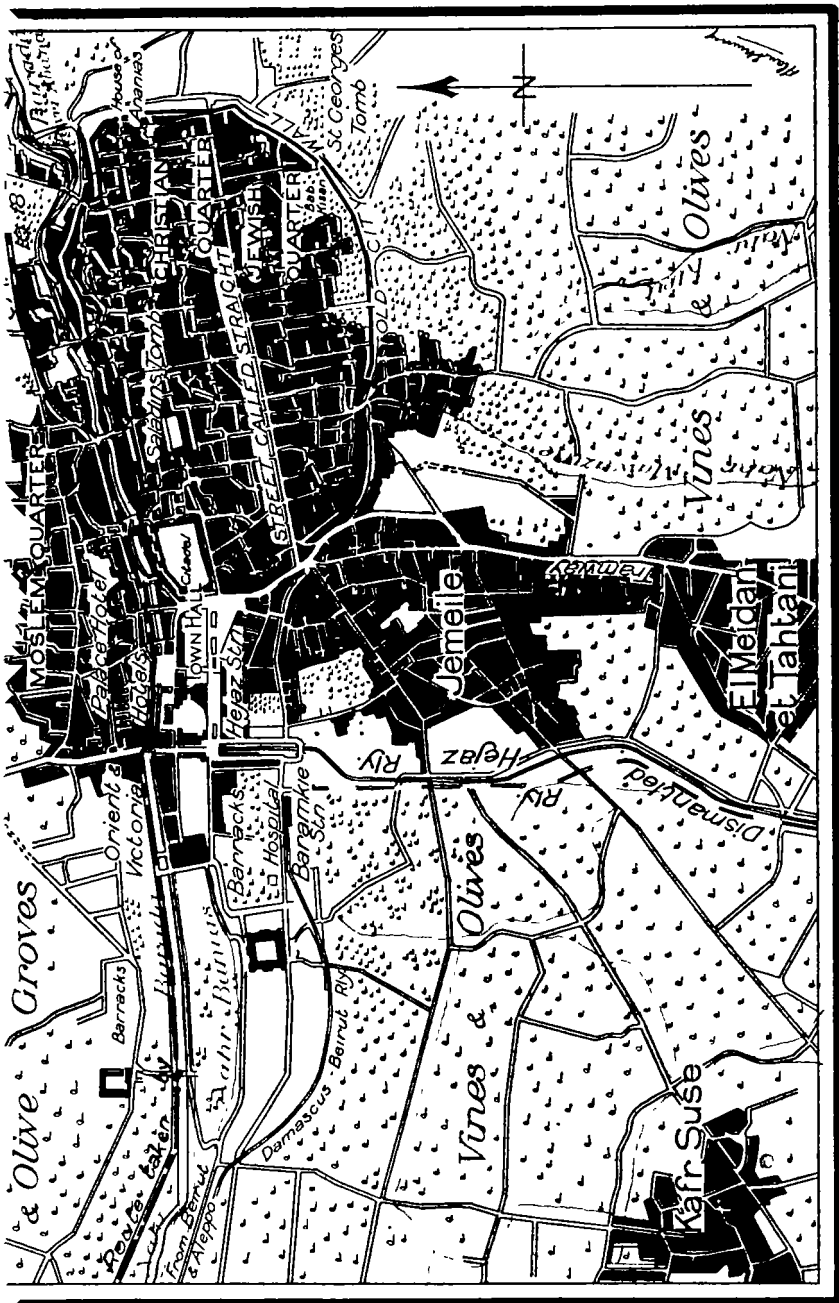
upon the overmarched and beaten foe. A handful of the brigade scouts under Foulkes-Taylor (the youngster who had galloped Es Salt earlier in the year) probed out the way, closely followed by Todd's 10th Regiment, with Major Timperley's squadron leading.

The passage through the gorge was restricted to a walk by the terrible effects of the previous evening's slaughter. The roadway was heaped up with dead and wounded Turks and Germans, vehicles, and killed and maimed teams of cattle and horses. So deadly had been the shooting that, despite all the cover close at hand along the bends of the gorge and about the vehicles, 370 dead were counted, and great numbers of wounded. A flock of sheep which had accompanied one of the columns were all dead upon the road, and even dogs had been shot. At Dumar a troop-train was taken with 480 prisoners, and among the wreckage along the route were eight guns and thirty machine-guns. But, though the scene was grim, and they as yet knew nothing of the sporting enterprise ahead, the Western Australians, long seasoned alike to the horrors and the risks of war, rode with light hearts through the early morning shadows of the winding pass. The train at Dumar had contained, besides great wealth in gold and silver coin, a store of German cigars; and, as the troopers passed out of the gorge, and the sun-touched minarets of the city rose above the beautiful tangle of green gardens splashed with ripening fruit and gay with flowers, they blew forth clouds of smoke, and seemed to have no thought beyond their keen relish of the moment.

Their way was along a narrow dusty road on the north bank of the swirling main stream of the Barada, now contained between straight banks as it leads into the city; on their left was a dingy mud wall, and then sharply rising gardens enclosing the richest homes of Damascus. As Timperley and Major Olden (second in command of the 10th Regiment) rode forward behind the scouts, their appearance was the signal for an outburst of scattered rifle-fire. A few shots came from Turkish snipers, but most of the rifles were discharged into the air as an exuberant greeting from the Arabs. Now clear of the pass and definitely committed, Olden increased the pace to the gallop, and, raising a dense cloud of dust, the

MAP





DAMASCUS AND ENVIRONS, SHOWING ROUTE TAKEN BY 3RD AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE THROUGH THE CITY.

squadron dashed on towards the centre of the city. As they bowled along beside the Barada, they passed within less than 200 yards of the great Turkish hospital and barracks across the stream on their right, where many thousands of enemy troops were assembled, apparently just rousing themselves for breakfast. But the pace was not slackened, and the Turks, dazed with exhaustion and sickness, made no attempt to use their rifles. Riding up to the bridge beside the Victoria Hotel, Olden and Timperley were attracted by a great throng of people outside the Serai on the other side of the water. Sword in hand, the Australians clattered over the bridge, charged through the crowd, and pulled up in front of the building. Scores of eager hands seized their reins, and Olden and Timperley, taking their revolvers and followed by a few troopers, entered the building and demanded to see the civil governor.

Early as was the hour—it was then between 6.30 and 7 a.m.—the hall was packed with the notables. When the clamour caused by the appearance of the Australians was stilled, Emir Said advanced. Olden, unaware of the situation, told him that Damascus was surrounded by many thousands of Chauvel's troops, and resistance was impossible; he next demanded an assurance that his troops would not be molested, and gave in return the undertaking that the lives and property of the populace would not be molested. Emir Said, with characteristic Eastern dignity, readily acquiesced. "In the name of the civil population of Damascus," he said, "I welcome the British army." He formally wrote out his assurance for Olden, who, declining eagerly-proffered hospitality, left the building and continued his ride towards the Homs road.

The old city was now delirious with excitement. Christians and Arabs, in all the colours of their varied dress, crowded about the light horse column. Rugs and silks, flowers and perfumes, with fruits and other delicacies, were thrown from the windows, and the mob fought for the privilege of holding and touching the stirrups of the victors. Only with great difficulty was Wilson's stern march to action stopped from degenerating into a tumultuous and indefinite triumphal procession about the streets and bazaars. Zeki Bey, an officer

detailed by Emir Said to guide the column to the Homs road, could not be made to understand that the Australians were anxious to get clear of the city as soon as possible. He insisted upon a parade; but a Greek merchant, who had formerly lived in Jaffa, came to the rescue, and led the way across the city out towards the north.

From the westward hills modern Damascus, with its tall gardens and its towers and minarets, is fair to look upon. But, after passing in through wide orchards and trailing vines and stately avenues of poplars and other decorative trees, the crowded city itself is dingy and squalid. No trace remains of the old-time splendour; even the famous bazaars, although occasionally they yield a treasure in ancient dyes and Eastern handicraft, are stocked chiefly with shoddy goods from the West. Yet the city is still to the traveller a place of magic and glamour, which "doth tease us out of thought as doth eternity." The Australians on this wonderful morning were the only calm, purposeful men in the clamorous city. Years of campaigning had moulded them into reserved men of the world, and the streets of old Damascus were but a stage in the long path of war. They rode with drawn swords, dusty and unshaven, their big hats battered and drooping, through the excited people of the ancient city, with the same easy casual bearing, and the same quiet self-confidence, which mark their bearing on their country tracks at home. They ate their grapes, and smoked their cigars, and missed no dark smiling eyes at the windows; but they showed no excitement or elation. And their lean, long-tailed horses, at home now like their riders on any road in the world, found nothing in the shouting mob or banging rifles of the Arabs, or in the narrow ways and vivid hues of the bazaars, to cause them once to shy or even cock an ear.

Soon after 7 o'clock Wilson was clear of the city and in vigorous pursuit of the enemy columns in flight towards Homs. When a few months before he had galloped Es Salt so brilliantly, he took no special steps to advise General Hodgson of his success, but had proceeded at once with the complete fulfilment of his orders. So now at Damascus he sent back no messenger and left no troops in the city, but went on after the enemy with every man in his brigade. When,

therefore, soon after he had cleared the streets, Lawrence rode into the town with a few Arab horsemen on the heels of the advance-guard of the 14th Cavalry Brigade, the Arabs believed that they shared with the Indians the honour of the first entry. The delight of the tribesmen was boundless. Galloping with wild shouts about the streets, trailing their coloured silks and cottons and firing their rifles, they made a brave display. Their melodramatic demonstration, in sharp contrast to the casual bearing of the hard-fighting Australians, who had risked all nearly two hours earlier, chilled the Christians, but aroused the great Moslem crowds to frenzy. About 8.30 a.m. Chauvel drove in from his advance-headquarters at Kaukab to arrange for the civil administration of the city. He found Shukri Pasha at the Serai, agreed that he should act temporarily as military governor, and then drove back to confer with his three Divisional Commanders.

Bourchier, with the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments, had passed the night on the edge of plantations south-west of the city. About 6 a.m. Hodgson ordered him to push patrols forward, and the leading squadrons, under Major J. C. Chanter,¹ working through the crooked lanes, came upon thousands of Turks assembled about the hospital and barracks. The enemy troops showed no disposition to fight; but, as they still carried arms and Chanter had only about 100 men, he waited for the rest of the 4th Regiment to come up. The enemy was then challenged, and about 12,000 Turks laid down their rifles. These wretched men had been marching hard for ten days on their long journey from Gilead and Bashan, and were in the last stage of exhaustion. Driven hard by Barrow, and worried all the way by the Arabs, short of rations and tramping on blistered and bleeding feet, they presented a lamentable picture of physical and mental suffering. Dysentery was general and acute, and malaria and other diseases, including cholera and typhus, were already rife in their ranks and were rapidly spreading. The great barrack, which had been turned into a hospital, was packed with severe cases; desperately sick men, utterly broken in spirit, lay

¹ Maj J. C. Chanter, D.S.O. 4th L.H. Regt. Farmer and saw-miller; of Echuca, Vic; b Pannoomilloo, Vic, 17 Feb., 1881.

huddled together on all the floor-space, in the surrounding sheds, and out under the trees. During the day it was discovered that every other building used as a hospital in the city was equally crowded. Medical supplies were exhausted; the doctors and nursing staffs, unable to meet the demand on their services, were collapsing from strain and sleeplessness. The Turkish tragedy was culminating in Damascus.

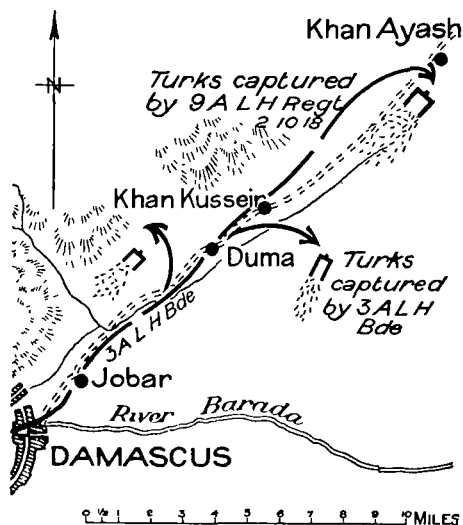
Meanwhile, as the Arabs, under their compact with the Allies, proceeded to take over the control of the city, Wilson was assailing the enemy's rear-guard with great dash on the northern road. Up to Khan Kusseir (a little north of the village of Duma) the road runs through vineyards and olive-groves which favoured the retreating foe. German machine-gunners resisted the advance with a persistence undiminished by all their long forced marches, repeated defeats, and invariable desertion by the Turks for whose safety they were fighting. But the light horsemen, although they had now been two nights without sleep, advanced with an exultant sense of superiority which swept all before it. The first resistance after clearing the suburbs came from German machine-gunners at a bridge over the Wady Maraba, about four miles south-west of Duma. Advancing on foot, a party of the Western Australians quickly cleared the bridge, taking two machine-guns and twelve prisoners. Lieutenant Patterson then led a squadron of the 10th wide on the left through the olives and vines, and closed in on Duma from the north-west. The enemy was strongly posted about the village and was supported by many machine-guns; but the light horsemen, riding in with much spirit, disconcerted the Germans by their pace, and after a brief fight the force fled. Five hundred prisoners, including forty Germans, were taken, together with thirty-seven machine-guns, and the pursuit was vigorously carried up to Khan Kusseir.

The Germans appeared to possess a generous supply of machine-guns. Though, each time that they were rushed, they abandoned their weapons, those who escaped capture came into action with fresh guns a few miles further on. About Khan Kusseir the enemy resisted stubbornly in the streets, and there was some hot work with the bayonet. Captain Bryant with six machine-guns did excellent work, and forty Germans,

120 Turks, and a number of machine-guns fell into the hands of the Australians. Wilson's advance-guard was now close to a Turkish column some 2,000 strong, which could be seen heading for a pass through the hills at Khan Ayash. The enemy's rear-guard, about a mile in width, was still strong in machine-guns. The hills on the flanks made an enveloping movement difficult, and a squadron of the 9th, attempting to move up on the west, was held up by effective fire. The Australians, however, pressed in close from the rear and with machine-gun fire caused heavy losses in the Turkish ranks. While still aiming to work round the enemy, Wilson was advised of a cavalry force some 3,000 strong about four miles away, moving towards him from the north-east. The report was disconcerting. His machine-gunners were on their last belts of ammunition, and no supplies were within sight. He therefore called off the 10th from the attack, and sent forward a squadron

of the 8th with the brigade scouts to reconnoitre the new force. It was found to be a huge and harmless caravan of armed Arabs on camels, moving south on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. But the delay had enabled the enemy to reach the pass and escape. Wilson's men and horses had eaten their last remaining rations at dawn, and the

brigade was now compelled to fall back on Duma in search of foodstuffs from the natives. The day's fighting north of Damascus had yielded 750 prisoners and eighty machine-guns, and the performance was the more meritorious because of the absence of artillery support.



Soon after 6 o'clock on the morning of the 2nd, a strong force of enemy infantry was observed to the north, only about a mile from the bivouac of the 9th Regiment, marching rapidly for the pass at Khan Ayash. The squadrons mounted hastily for the pursuit. This proved to be the last light horse engagement in the campaign, and in the clever tactics employed, and the dash of the squadrons, it was a fitting close to the four years of service. Trotting briskly through the vineyards, Major Daly, who was temporarily in command, led the regiment up on the left of the enemy column, between the road on which they were marching and a ridge of hills. As the Australians appeared, the Germans employed machine-guns, and small parties were pushed across towards the hills to prevent the horsemen reaching the head of the column. But these were brushed aside, and Daly rode on until he was opposite the centre of the force. He then sent forward two squadrons under Major W. T. Charley² and Major C. Bleechmore,³ one to seize the pass at Khan Ayash and the other to get astride of the road at Kubbett I Asafir; the third squadron dismounted and opened rifle and Hotchkiss fire on the column. The advanced squadrons quickly reached their objectives; the Turks, seeing their retreat cut off, halted, and a conference appeared to be taking place at the head of the column. Seizing his opportunity, Daly charged mounted with the squadron which had been fighting on foot, and at the same time sent a small party to gallop round the rear of the column. The Australians, shouting loudly and waving their swords, rushed down on the enemy, and, although they were only about 100 strong, the Turks threw down their arms before the horses reached them and surrendered. Not a man escaped. Ninety-one officers and 318 cavalymen, 1,064 Turkish infantrymen, and eight Germans were taken, as well as three guns, twenty-six machine-guns, and much material. The booty also included the standard of the 46th Turkish Regiment—a significant trophy, as it was the only enemy flag captured in action by the Australians during the war. Among the officers

² Lt.-Col. W. T. Charley, V.D.; 9th L.H. Regt. Motor representative; b. Ballarat, Vic., 7 Sept., 1867. Died, 4 Dec., 1932.

³ Maj. C. Bleechmore. Second-in-command, 9th L.H. Regt., 1918/19. Medical student and agriculturalist; of Glenelg, S. Aust.; b. Norwood, London, Eng., 4 June, 1892.

taken was the Turkish commander of the force which had so successfully defended Shunet Nimrin against the Londoners during the second British raid into Gilead. From the time when the light horsemen left bivouac to the capture of the force, less than an hour had passed.

After the surrender of the main column two light horse signallers, J. N. Smyth⁴ and N. C. Halliday,⁵ were riding back to regimental headquarters when they came upon a party of three Germans and eighty-five Turks. A German officer was at the moment engaged in preparing a light machine-gun for action. With fine daring the two signallers dashed at him on their horses. Although met with bombs, they overpowered the officer and seized his revolver, and one opened fire with it on the Turks while the other swung round the machine-gun. The whole party, surprised and browbeaten, surrendered.

On September 26th, when Allenby ordered the advance northwards from Esdraelon, some 45,000 Turks and Germans were believed to be retreating on Damascus or within the city itself. Of these 20,000 were captured, and many thousands destroyed. "The remnants of the Turkish armies in Palestine and Syria," to quote Allenby's words, "numbering some 17,000 men, of whom only 4,000 were effective rifles, fled northwards from Damascus a mass of individuals, without organisation, without transport, and without any of the necessities required to enable it to act even on the defensive." Some of these fugitives were on the night of October 2nd still within a few miles of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade. But already Wilson was seventeen miles north of Damascus, and, as the supply problem was becoming acute, the brigade was withdrawn to Kaukab. Allenby had no thought of ceasing his advance at Damascus. The road was now clear right up to Aleppo, and the Commander-in-Chief was determined to exploit his triumph to the extreme limit of the strength of his horses and the capacity of his transport. But a temporary halt was imperative.

The situation at Damascus was one unparalleled in warfare. True to its compact, and ignoring the disinay and the protests

⁴ Pte. J. N. Smyth, D C M (No. 902, 9th L.H. Regt.). Jockey; b. Hamilton, Vic., 1 Jan., 1895. Died of illness, 25 Oct., 1918.

⁵ Pte N. C. Halliday, D C M (No. 1458, 9th L.H. Regt.). Station foreman, of Aldgate, S. Aust.; b. Stirling West, S. Aust., 19 May, 1893.

of the capable Christians, the British Government, through the Commander-in-Chief, handed over the administration of the great city to the Arabs immediately on its capture. It is true that many of the Arab civil servants employed by the Turks still remained in their offices, and of these some were efficient men. But the strong guiding hand in the affairs of the city had been the Turk's, and during the war the organising genius of the Germans had been the decisive factor. The old civil government had been superseded by military control; when on September 30th Djemal Pasha and the Germans fled from the city, its administration collapsed into chaos. Although surrounded with fresh produce, and with the great harvest of the Hauran at its gates, Damascus was, owing to the disorganisation and confusion caused by the overthrow of the Turks, at the moment desperately short of foodstuffs. Thousands of the populace were starving, and children were dying in the streets. The Arabs of the city were excited, turbulent, and in no mood for work. When Chauvel with his great body of horsemen reached the city, he had already strained the resources of his supply columns almost to breaking-point, and the rationing of his troops and animals for the next few days called for keenest initiative and superhuman energy. But still more desperate was the situation of the 20,000 exhausted Turkish prisoners, who, unless they were to perish miserably, must at once be generously fed. If the raising of foodstuffs had been left in the hands of British supply officers for a few days, the problem would have been solved, and much suffering and loss of life avoided. But from the moment when control was handed over to the Arabs, not a bushel of grain or a pound of meat or fruit could be requisitioned for the army without their consent and agency.

The task before the Arabs would have taxed the capacity of a Western Power accustomed to managing the affairs of great cities. To the Arabs it was impossible. Most of the local notables were incompetent and corrupt; the men of the Hejaz, from Feisal down, had been accustomed only to the control of insanitary little desert towns and squalid villages. It was inevitable, moreover, that the Damascenes and the Hejaz men should be from the outset divided by misunderstanding

and active jealousy. The open hostility of the Emir Said was so pronounced that the Hejaz force suspected him of organising a counter-rebellion, and he was by Lawrence's orders seized and imprisoned.

During the night following its capture the populace continued its tumult, and the city sounded with shouting crowds and banging rifles. Lawrence had been followed into Damascus by some thousands of Arab horsemen, armed to excess with rifles, swords, daggers, and revolvers, and as a rule with their unfortunate ponies heavily laden with many bandoliers of ammunition. But of this wild horde, picturesque and fierce of aspect, very few were trained men or subject to discipline. A few hundred smart regulars of the Hejaz Camel Corps, mounted on camels and dressed in khaki—who had been organised and led for more than two years with marked capacity by Colonel Joyce, a British regular officer—were the only troops who had followed Feisal all the way up from southern Arabia. In the advance northwards tribe after tribe had given more or less service in its district for a price in gold and the prospect of loot; and, apart from the regulars, nearly all the tribesmen who rode into Damascus were natives of the country north of Deraa. At their heels came swarms of the meaner Bedouins of the desert, lured by the splendid prospect of looting the wealth of the town. Accompanied by their women and camels and asses, they streamed across the plain, lusting for an orgy of pillage. Entering on the night of October 1st, they had by morning packed their women and animals with staggering loads of various army stores and merchandise, and dawn discovered them making for the outlets. The Hejaz authorities sought and obtained permission to deal with them, and did their work effectively. With unexpected forbearance, they killed very few of the pillagers, but were content to terrify them with much galloping of horses, firing of rifles, and unmerciful flogging with sticks. This chastisement, and the uproar it aroused—which were highly entertaining to the light horsemen about the outskirts of the town—lasted for some hours; among a people less fearful of physical pain, the passions awakened must have plunged the whole city into bloodshed. But among Arabs and Syrians hot temper and loud speech draw little blood, and

British observers had always the belief that the intervention of a regiment of light horsemen, battle-worn as they were, would at any time have driven the rabble to their houses.

Quiet military efficiency, as represented by dusty men in dull khaki, was not convincing to the pageant-loving Damascenes. The Turk had fled, but as yet the populace had seen very little of the conquerors, and Chauvel decided to try upon the agitated populace the steadying effect of a march through the streets in strength. Escorted by a squadron of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment (under Major R. N. Franklin^a) as bodyguard, the Australian leader rode through the city about noon on October 2nd, followed by units representative of his three cavalry divisions. All the might of the British Empire was represented in that wonderful parade. Yeomen and gunners rode for the United Kingdom, light horsemen and New Zealanders for the Dominions, the lancers for India. Britain's allies were present in the shape of a detachment of French cavalry from Onslow's brigade. The spectacle, deeply impressive as a demonstration of triumphant physical force, was significant of much beyond Damascus. Its effect on the Damascenes was electrical. The turbulent city was instantly awed into silence, broken only by restrained handclapping and cheers. The great prancing horses, the grim tired men with the swords and lances, and the sinister guns rattling over the cobbles, struck fear and order into the hearts of dense masses of people who lined the route. As the column passed out of the streets, the fanatical excitement vanished, and the city went back to its work; merchants brought forth from secret hiding-places the wares which they had removed from their shops in fear of lawlessness, and in a few hours Damascus was in the enjoyment of a brisk trade with the British soldiery.

The new Hejaz administration worked hard to demonstrate its capacity for governing the city; but its task was an almost impossible one. Jealous at once of the British who had done all or nearly all the fighting, the Hejaz men resented the presence of Australians in the streets. And yet, when a reliable guard was needed for Emir Said, or any other work had to be done which called for capacity and striking force,

^a Maj. R. N. Franklin, D S O 2nd L H. Regt Bank official, of Lismore District, N S W.; b. Surbiton, Eng., 18 April, 1883. Died of illness, 6 July, 1919.

light horsemen were pressed into the service. In its endeavour to requisition supplies for the Turks the administration broke down utterly; while the countryside was teeming with grain and tibbon, Chauvel's horses were for days confined to a ration of seven pounds of corn. The little band of British officers who had been responsible for the organisation and maintenance and activities of the Arab army worked day and night to improve the situation, but their efforts were strangled by native incompetence and general disorder. An Australian supply officer, responsible for the feeding of the 20,000 Turks, mentioned to one of these Englishmen that he was assured of 5,000 loaves of bread at dawn on the following day. "How many are promised?" asked the Englishman. "Five thousand," replied the Australian. "I suggest," said the Englishman, "that you go at once and get a definite promise of 20,000. Then, if you are lucky, you may get 2,000." That was characteristic.

But the cares of Feisal did not end at Damascus. Unknown to Allenby, the Arab leader's agents had been active further west and north in that part of Syria which, between the French and British Governments, had been looked upon as of special interest to France. Whatever was to be done with Damascus, the Anti-Lebanons, and the hinterland northward as far as Deraa, it was no part of the Allies' arrangement that Feisal should extend the Hejaz movement into the Lebanons and along the Syrian coast. But some days after the capture of the city came the news that Feisal's secret Arab committees at Beirut, Tripoli, and other centres in which France believed she had superior claims, had seized the Government and hoisted the Hejaz flag. The situation at once became delicate between the British and French, and Allenby, who reached Damascus by motor-car on October 3rd, was obliged to act promptly and strongly. Summoning Feisal to the Hotel Victoria, he explained that the influence of the Arabs was not to extend westward of the Anti-Lebanons. Feisal, recognising his helplessness, and perhaps appreciating also what he owed to the British, reluctantly agreed to carry out the British leader's orders. The development was unfortunate for the Arab cause, inasmuch as it very naturally awakened the suspicion of the French as to Feisal's ambitions.

Its immediate consequence, moreover, was to deprive the Arabs of the valuable services of Lawrence, who proceeded to England to discuss with the British Government the complication in relation to France.

Halted for a few days about Damascus, the three cavalry divisions rejoiced in their pleasant surroundings. They had arrived too late for the apricots, for which the orchards of Damascus are world-famous; but the wide vineyards were laden with grapes of rare quality, and the city stalls glowed with pomegranates and other luscious fruits. After their long summer ride over the bare plains, the men delighted in the widespread plantations, and rested and slept in the deep shade of the trees. Everywhere they were within sight and sound of cold, clear, running water. Damascus seemed indeed to have been worth the winning. Their sense of satisfaction was deepened by the slight cost they had paid for their achievements.

From September 19th to October 2nd the casualties suffered by the Australian Mounted Division were:

		Killed.		Wounded.
3rd A.L.H. Brigade	..	3	..	28
5th A.L.H. Brigade	..	3	..	6
Bourchier's Force	..	1	..	8
11th Regiment at Semakh	..	14	..	29
		<hr/>		<hr/>
		21		71

The prisoners captured by the division were:

3rd A.L.H. Brigade	..	..	11,025
5th A.L.H. Brigade	..	..	7,523
Bourchier's Force	..	..	12,423
11th Regiment at Semakh	..	..	364
		<hr/>	
			31,335

The 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions lost even fewer men by casualties than the Australians. After the collapse of the enemy there was a large element of luck in the capture of prisoners, and although the Indians took many thousands they were less fortunate than Hodgson's division.

But the sense of gratification felt by Chauvel's men in their great and almost bloodless advance, and in finding themselves in the beautiful garden region of Damascus, was short-lived. The troops, and especially the Australians, were, as we have seen, physically reduced and jaded when the operation began. A great many had already suffered from malignant malaria, and were subject to its recurrence at any time. On their ride north they had all camped for a number of nights about the malarial banks of the Jordan and along the shores of Galilee, and the mosquitoes had been busy among them. In the last glorious day's advance on the city many men were reeling in their saddles with fever, and fighting desperately to stall off the disease until the goal of their leaders was attained. As the operations about the town ceased, the sickness spread with ominous rapidity; within a few days more than half the men of many regiments were on their backs. The scourge of pneumonic influenza, which was raging in many parts of the world, was at that time sweeping through the Near East, and assailed the spent troops in a virulent form. Already all the buildings in the city were overflowing with sick Turks; British medical supplies were slow in reaching Damascus, and the nearest casualty clearing station was a Kuneitra, forty miles away. The Turks in the main hospital died at the rate of seventy or eighty a day, and were buried by their fellow countrymen in a great continuous trench.

The British and Australian medical officers worked as they had never worked before in the campaign, and each day the number of their patients increased, and their labours grew heavier. The doctors were themselves sorely reduced by sickness. For instance, of the six on the staff of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Field Ambulance only two were fit for duty; "One of these," as Wilson has recorded, "was sent to look after a hospital in Damascus, and the sole survivor was himself very ill, but carried on." Scattered cases of cholera, and many cases of typhus, threatened the men of both armies with a crowning calamity. Every headquarters from corps to squadron was more or less a hospital, where the fortunate lay on stretchers, but most had to be content with a place on the floor, or out in the shade of the trees, while they battled with raging fevers. Many brave

men who, as if with charmed lives, had fought through from the early days in Gallipoli, died miserably here in the hour of victory.

But if the plight of the British, and especially of the Australians, was tragic, that of the hapless Turks was incomparably worse. They, too, were stalwart veterans of the long war—and, indeed, of many wars—hardy, frugal men with a remarkable insensibility to disease, and capable of endurance, in seasons of stress, far beyond the troops of Western races. But at Damascus their collapse was absolute. Their long, forced fighting retreat for 120 miles in eight days had exhausted them physically; their utter rout seemed to have conquered them morally. With the fatalism of the Orient, they seemed to have struggled on to Damascus with their last flicker of strength and resolution, and then resigned themselves to die. An Australian doctor, speaking with tears in his eyes of a very gallant light horse officer who died in Damascus at that time, said, "If he would have fought for himself just a little, I could have saved him; but he was so worn by successive attacks of malaria that he looked only for rest." So it was with the great majority of the 20,000 Turkish prisoners. Of the 3,000 or 4,000 who died, many were the victims of positive disease, but more failed through physical exhaustion and moral despair.

Some 16,000 were marched out to Kaukab, where they were fortunate in being placed under the masterful care of Todd, of the 10th Regiment. Todd excelled in organisation, and though then a sick man himself, applied his failing strength with chivalrous devotion to the succour of the fallen foe. His work is well described by Brigadier-General Wilson in a narrative of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade: "When we took the Turks over," writes Wilson, "they were in a mob under some scattered palm trees near Kaukab on the bank of a creek. They had no cover even for the sick. There were a large number of officers with them, but they were also in a dazed condition and would not make the slightest effort to organise or ameliorate the condition of the men. Few of the men had blankets; they had no medical organisation. There were no drugs, bandages, or food fit for sick men; no sanitation. Food for the prisoners was scarce. Men were

dying at the rate of 170 a day. Lieutenant-Colonel Todd took the control of the compound in hand, and soon put a different complexion on the matter. Very little assistance could be obtained from the local Arab authorities of Damascus, who had taken possession of the Turkish army stores. They demurred from doing anything unless paid exorbitant rates in gold. They did not like English paper money. However, by bluff and threats, blankets for the men were got out of them; sheep were requisitioned from the surrounding country. Prisoners were organised into companies of 100 each under their own N.C.O's; arrangements were made for the daily cleaning of the area; three Syrian doctors were obtained from amongst the prisoners; the worst of the sick were removed under cover in a neighbouring village, and the daily death rate was reduced from 170 to fifteen. About 1,500 died during the period that we controlled the camp."

In Damascus itself the condition of the hospitals was deplorable. Only the highly dangerous cases could be admitted at all, and the crowded wards were lamentably short of doctors, trained orderlies, and drugs. The hopeless Arab administration was indifferent to human suffering. Chauvel, therefore, with the concurrence of Feisal, appointed an Australian officer, Lieutenant-Colonel E. M. Williams, who was attached to Desert Mounted Corps, to take over the control of all hospitals, and with the arrival of British medical stores the situation steadily improved.

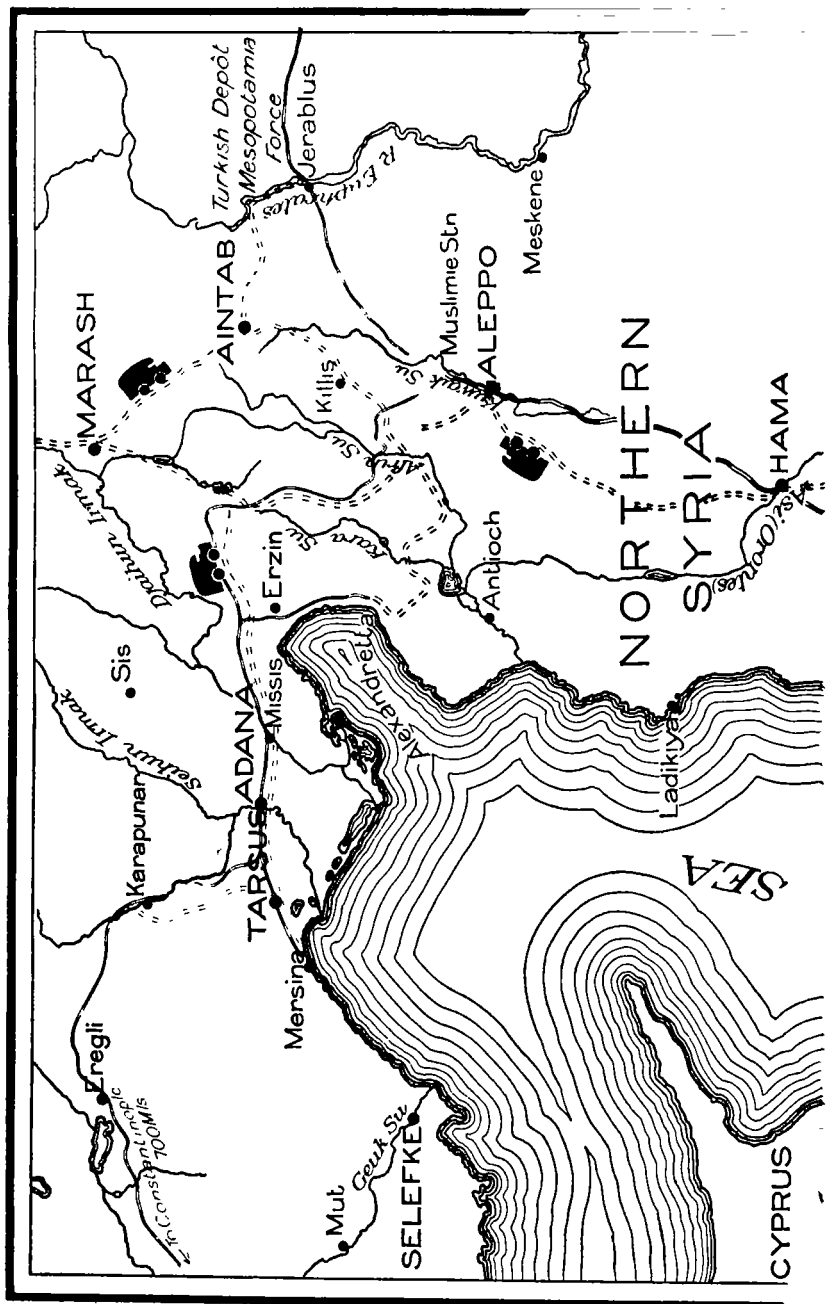
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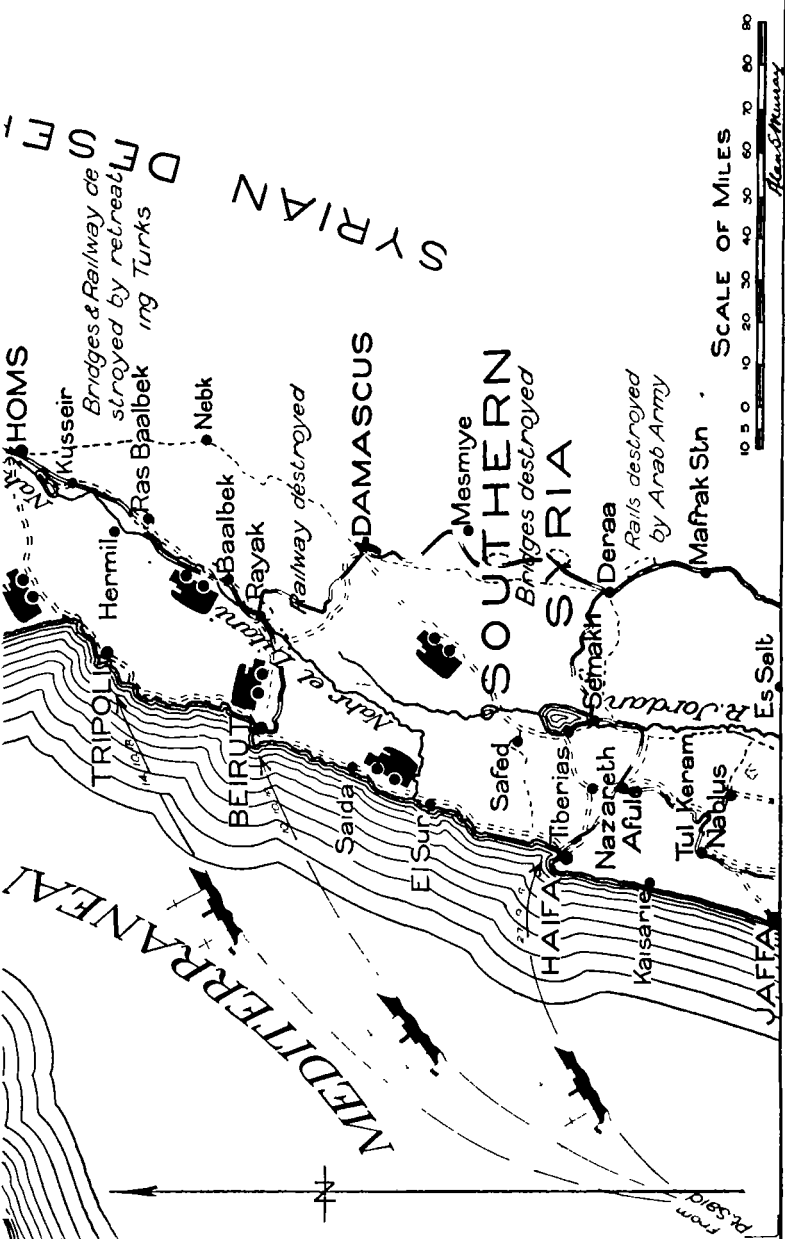
ALEPPO AND THE ARMISTICE

MEANWHILE Chauvel was advancing towards Aleppo, 200 miles north of Damascus. A leader less bold and confident in execution than Allenby might have justified a halt of more than a few days at Damascus. His three cavalry divisions, it is true, had by October 3rd, when he ordered Chauvel forward, suffered very little wastage from battle casualties; and the sickness, which came so swiftly just afterwards, was not then pronounced. But his horsemen had covered 200 miles in forced marches, and communications and supplies, already strained, must become precarious before Aleppo was reached. On October 3rd the 7th (Meerut) Infantry Division began to march from Haifa to Beirut along the coast; and Allenby, anticipating an open port there and at Tripoli further north, could count on drawing rations for his cavalry across the Lebanons from the coast. Nevertheless his decision was born of rare ambition and resolution.

At the conference with Feisal on October 3rd he had arranged with Chauvel that the Australian Mounted Division should guard Damascus, while the 5th Cavalry Division, followed by the 4th, passed west through the Barada Gorge to the Baalbek plain between the Lebanons, and attacked Rayak. The Arabs, marching north from Damascus on the east of Anti-Lebanons, were to join up with the British at Homs. Rayak, which is the junction of the main broad-gauge railway from the Bosphorus with the narrow-gauge services to Beirut and Damascus, was reported to be occupied by a few thousand Turks and Germans. Macandrew moved from Damascus on the 5th, accompanied by armoured cars and the No. 1 Australian Light Car Patrol under Captain E. H. James. The enemy withdrew from Rayak on his approach and fled north, after burning thirty aeroplanes and great quantities of materials; but much of the rolling-stock, ammunition, and stores left behind was in good condition. An armoured-car reconnaissance to Beirut on the 7th discovered that the enemy had evacuated, and that

MAP





BRITISH AND TURKISH LINES OF COMMUNICATION AFTER THE CAPTURE OF ALEPPO.

French warships had already entered the port. Zahle, a few miles north of Rayak, was taken by Macandrew without opposition; the armoured cars entered Baalbek, with its glorious ruins, on the 9th, and secured 500 distressed Turks who had surrendered to the inhabitants. The Meerut Division, after a fine march over the Ladder of Tyre—where the Indians in a few hours of strenuous labour cut round the cliff a roadway capable of carrying wheels—marched up the picturesque road past Tyre and Sidon along the narrow fringe between the Lebanons and the sea, and reached Beirut on the 8th. Here the inhabitants handed over 660 Turks who had thrown themselves on their mercy, and the division pressed on for Tripoli. This advance at once eased the transport problem for the cavalry on the Baalbek plain, and the 5th Cavalry Division entered Homs on October 15th, two days after the armoured cars and corps cavalry, preceding the 7th Infantry Division, had reached Tripoli.

Aleppo was still 100 miles away. Some 20,000 Turks and Germans were believed to be in the city, but only 8,000 were fighting men, and Allenby was confident that they would be in poor fighting condition. He therefore ordered the rapid continuation of the march. But disease was now rampant in the cavalry. During one week in October, one of the mounted brigades evacuated 61 per cent. of its men; another brigade lost 58 per cent., and a division 40 per cent. within ten days. Barrow's division, which was to have followed Macandrew's, was so reduced on reaching Baalbek that not enough men were left to attend to the horse-lines, and its further employment became impossible. Chauvel therefore decided to push for Aleppo with Macandrew's division alone, to withdraw Barrow's strongest brigade to guard Damascus, and to advance the Australian Mounted Division to Aleppo as rapidly as possible.

Reinforced by two additional light-armoured motor batteries and another light car patrol, Macandrew moved from Homs on the 20th. Crossing the Orontes at Er Rastan, after the bridge destroyed by the enemy had been restored, he divided his force, and pushed on himself with the armoured cars, the light car patrols, and the 15th Cavalry Brigade, leaving the rest of his cavalry to follow. Hama was

entered without opposition, and the enemy was not met until Khan Sebil was reached on the afternoon of the 22nd. Here a force of Turks and Germans was seen, but on the appearance of Macandrew's force they fled in motor-lorries covered by one armoured car. In the sporting chase which followed the armoured car was captured, and James with the Australian patrol, after making a wide *détour*, cut off one of the motor-lorries. Next day the Australians in their cars had a wild chase over very rough country after a cavalry patrol, and returned with some prisoners.

Macandrew appeared before Aleppo on the 22nd, with the Sherifian force—which had been joined by a considerable body of the Aneze Arabs—well up on his right, and demanded the surrender of the town. The Turkish commander, however, who had about 8,000 troops in the city, and was not impressed by Macandrew's slight column, refused to capitulate. Macandrew therefore decided to wait for the remainder of his force before attacking, and the 24th and 25th passed without activity. On the 25th a German airman, seeing a long column of motor-lorries bearing supplies to Macandrew from Tripoli, reported to the Turks that the British cavalry was receiving substantial reinforcements of infantry, and the commander resolved to surrender Aleppo on the morning of the 26th. During the night of the 25th he began to withdraw his troops from the city, but, as they marched, a body of the Sherifian troops, made up chiefly of Aneze Arabs, appeared in the streets. The Arabs fiercely attacked a Turkish rear-guard battalion, which, after being severely mauled, fought its way out in square formation. When Macandrew advanced into the town on the morning of the 26th, he found the Arabs in possession, and the pursuit of the enemy was at once resumed by the 15th Cavalry Brigade and the armoured car column. Eight miles north-west of Aleppo a body of about 2,500 Turkish infantry, with 150 cavalry and from eight to ten guns, took up a position astride of the road to Alexandretta. The British at once attacked. While the armoured car column attempted to turn the enemy's right, the cavalry gallantly charged in on his left. The Mysore and Jodhpur Lancers galloped clean through the lines; many Turks were taken on the spears, and most of

the others threw down their arms. But the Indian squadrons were very weak from sick wastage; the Turks, taking courage, picked up their rifles and reclosed their ranks, and the cavalry and cars were compelled to break off the engagement. At nightfall the Turks resumed their march to a position in the hills about twenty miles north of Aleppo on the Alexandretta road.

Allenby still aimed at the utter destruction of the enemy force. But Macandrew's division, which had already marched 400 miles in thirty-eight days, was incapable of further effort, and it was decided to await the arrival at Aleppo of the Australian Mounted Division before resuming the offensive. Hodgson moved out from Damascus with his division (less the 10th Light Horse Regiment) on October 27th. Moving briskly, the Australians reached Homs early on the morning of November 1st, the last march having covered fifty miles. But the campaign was over. At 4 p.m. on October 31st, when the division was about Hasi, Hodgson received news that an armistice had been concluded with the Turks. After more than two and a half years in the saddle, marching and fighting almost incessantly in a desert alien land, the light horsemen might have been expected to greet this armistice with demonstrations of relief and joy. But the news was received calmly, almost with stolid indifference. In some measure the absence of excitement was perhaps due to the fact that the armistice had been fully anticipated, but in the main it was due to mental and physical weariness and to sharp personal sorrow. The Australians had taken battle casualties in the spirit of old soldiers, and had seldom shown outward signs of grief for those who had fallen; but the general state of disease at Damascus, and the many deaths, had shaken all men's nerves and left the regiments depressed and weary beyond expression. Supply and water difficulties made it impracticable for the division to halt on the ground which it occupied when the cessation of hostilities was proclaimed; and, as the column marched towards Homs throughout the night of the 31st, the men rode in a strange silence, as though grim action was still ahead—or like a force defeated rather than one whose victorious achievement, now complete, was scarcely paralleled in all the red story of the war. Throughout Allenby's army

the same quiet note prevailed, and even in Cairo, among the staff officers and troops on leave, there was very little rejoicing or merrymaking. Men who with such great-hearted purpose had carried the campaign to its triumphant end seemed incapable of the energy necessary for ostentatious celebration.

With the Turkish forces south of the Taurus annihilated, Allenby had no need to maintain a strong force on the occupied territory during the armistice. The splendid voluntary service of the Australians was recognised to be at an end, and the policing deemed essential was allotted mainly to Indian and British troops, whose term of duty in Palestine had been comparatively brief. Early in November the Australian Mounted Division marched across the Lebanon from Homs to Tripoli, where they went into a well-supplied and comfortable camp, while transport was arranged to Australia.

Meanwhile the Anzac Mounted Division, after its swift decisive raid from the Jordan valley to Amman, had been withdrawn first to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, then down to Richon and Wady Hanein and the surrounding sand-hills. Chaytor's Force had unhappily, like the divisions in the north, suffered severely from disease. The fighting around Amman was scarcely over before malaria, pneumonic influenza, and other maladies ran like fire through the ranks. Indians, British West Indians, and Jews shared in the suffering which followed; but the Australians and New Zealanders were especially afflicted. The 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealanders, had, alone of all the troops under Allenby's command, been subjected to the rigours of the campaign from the first crossing of the Canal. The remaining light horse regiments had been as long at work in the desert, but not in actual contact with the Turks. Other troops engaged in the advance had come and gone, sharing in all the hard knocks while they were in Sinai and Palestine, but then moving off to other fronts and enjoying restful periods of sea voyage and the stimulation of change.

From April, 1916, to the end of the war the Australians and New Zealanders had been the one constant force in the campaign, and of all the divisions engaged none had a record

of work and fighting to compare with the famous Anzacs commanded first by Chauvel and then by Chaytor. Fighting Romani, Magdhaba, and Rafa almost single-handed, they had cleared the Sinai Peninsula; they had led in Allenby's first advance when Beersheba was assailed; they had been the first troops into the Jordan valley, and the last to leave that sinister area. When they rode up to Amman, therefore, they were even lower in physical tone and in resistance to disease than the Australians of Hodgson's division. As they advanced from their lines in the Jordan valley, which the fine work of the medical service had kept relatively clear of malaria-bearing mosquitoes, many of them had spent a night or two on infested ground from which they had driven the Turks. There they were assailed by mosquitoes; and, after the period of incubation, the disease arising from that source alone was widespread and severe. Hundreds of other men, who had already suffered from the evil, relapsed as they climbed from the burning plain to the cold heights of Gilead. So sudden and general was the sickness that within a few days of the close of operations there were 900 stretcher cases concentrated around Jericho alone. As the various diseases developed, some of the regiments were so reduced that, when the withdrawal from Amman took place, the riderless horses, for the first time in the campaign, were driven along the tracks in mobs. Deaths were frequent. Among well-known officers of the Anzac and Australian Divisions who died at about this time were Lieutenant-Colonel McLaurin (commanding officer of the 8th Regiment, and a Gallipoli veteran) and Major Hudson, staff-captain of the 1st Brigade—a business man from the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, who was the most effective supply officer in adverse circumstances in all Palestine. Hudson's good humour, insistence, and ingenuity never failed to win foodstuffs for his brigade from the most obstinate and secretive village sheikhs. But, if the campaign closed in an atmosphere of sickness and death, exhaustion and depression, the consciousness of the amazing final victory, and thoughts turning to home, soon revived the spirits of the troops.

Little more need be said of Allenby's bold and splendid strategy, the perfection of his preparations, the superb working

of his vast and intricate machine, or of the spirit and sheer fighting efficiency of his troops. No army was ever in better trim for battle, nor was a force ever more completely under the influence of its commander. And perhaps not since the campaigns of Napoleon had a great decisive operation owed so much of its success to the individual strategy and will of its leaders. All that troops could have done was done by the men under Allenby's command; but the achievement must always be regarded as pre-eminently a staff victory. Chauvel's work with his three cavalry divisions was the dramatic and dominating feature of the advance; and here again, it was the faultless planning, and the rare success of the Australian leader in synchronising the work of his scattered columns—the most difficult of all tasks in warfare—rather than the actual fighting, which dismayed and overwhelmed the enemy. The dazzling ride of the cavalry, however, was dependent all the way upon the maintenance of supplies; and in this branch also the guidance and phenomenal resource and energy displayed were a triumph of individual genius. Had it not been for the grand dash of the infantry at the outset, the cavalry would never have been released for action; and the infantry advance was only rendered possible by the success of the huge secret concentration. Considered from any angle, therefore, the achievement must ever stand as a unique triumph for the Commander-in-Chief and his staff. The completeness with which his plans succeeded is illustrated by the destructive work of the air force, and especially by Chaytor's subsidiary operations east of Jordan. Chaytor's success was, to a greater degree perhaps than with the main operation, due to his own independent skill and timely aggressiveness; but his advance was almost in precise detail a fulfilment of his orders from Allenby.

In its range and the thoroughness of its victory, the advance completely vindicated the employment of a strong cavalry force against modern weapons. Without his four divisions of horse Allenby might have overthrown the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies on Samaria and Sharon; but only a prolonged series of pitched battles would have carried his infantry up to Damascus, and disease would probably have destroyed his army long before he reached that goal.

To Chauvel's cavalry alone was due not only the complete destruction of the enemy's forward armies, but the capture or annihilation of his reserves, his supply service, his dumps, his hospitals—in fact of every enemy appliance used in the war, and of nearly every man, from the fighting soldier to the labourer on roads and railways, between the plain of Sharon and Aleppo more than 300 miles to the north. On September 18th the enemy's war-machine was complete—a vast, intricate, but smooth-running organisation, served by scores of trains and thousands of vehicles on a great system of railways and roads, and by thousands of miles of telephone and telegraph wire; mighty, formidable, and instantly responsive to a single will. Within a month the whole fabric had vanished. The three armies were destroyed; the British had taken 75,000 prisoners (including 3,700 Germans and Austrians), more than 360 guns, 800 machine-guns, 210 motor-lorries, 50 motor-cars, 90 railway engines, 470 trucks and carriages, and 3,500 transport animals. By the middle of October scarcely a Turk was to be seen between Jaffa and Aleppo; and only isolated groups of guns, already rusted, and fragments of shattered wood and twisted iron deemed too worthless or heavy for removal by the looting natives, remained to tell of the strong foe and all his proud gear of war. That miraculous clearance Allenby owed to Chauvel and his cavalry.

Immediately after Chaytor's occupation of Amman, Colonel C. E. R. Mackesy¹ of the New Zealand force was appointed military governor of Es Salt and Amman. But, in conformity with the British policy east of the Jordan and the Lebanons, steps were immediately taken to transfer control to the Arabs. Sherif Abdulla Ibn Hamza, brother to Feisal, was already in the district, and on October 27th Gaafar Pasha, of the Sherifian army, arrived at Amman from Madeba. On the following day he formally took over the government of the Kerak, Amman, and Es Salt areas, and the Sherifian flag was unfurled. Colonel Mackesy and a few British officers remained to advise and assist the new administration; but with the departure of the 1st Light Horse Brigade, which was the last unit of Chaytor's Force to recross the Jordan, Moab

¹ Col C E R Mackesy, C M G, C B E., D S O. Land-owner and estate agent; of Whangarei, Auckland District, N.Z.; b. Dublin, Ireland, 9 Jan., 1861. Died. 20 Nov., 1925.

and Gilead were virtually surrendered to their traditional owners.

The Arabs had been richly rewarded for the part they played in the destruction of the Turks. If they had been unreliable as allies and unconvincing as fighters, they had, as the story of the campaign shows, been of great assistance to the British advance. Even if British troops had been available for a blow at the Turks in the Hejaz, their employment as an independent force about the holy shrines—or even against the railway, which is deemed sacred by the Moslems—would have had an extremely dangerous effect upon religious feeling in India, and would probably have aroused the hostility of the Arabs themselves. But future students will probably decide that the reward which British military power, and the Foreign Office policy, gave the Arabs for their services was far beyond their deserts. Their casualties were slight, the hardships they endured insignificant. All the way they were paid heavily in gold and enjoyed a prosperity never known in all the long history of their frugal race and desert land. Their compensation in territory, culminating in the possession of rich and bountiful Damascus, was on a scale of grandeur.

Above all, the war brought to the Arabs a revivifying influence which could not have come to them in centuries of peace. Their strong parochial jealousies were in some degree broken down; the bitter animosities of tribe against tribe were softened. For the first time for hundreds of years Arabs over a thousand miles from north to south came together for a common cause. It was true they were prompted by no high ideal, animated by no patriotism. They fought as mercenaries for British gold, and assailed the Turks as men lusting for easy plunder, rather than as men fighting spontaneously for the deliverance of their land from a hated alien yoke. Allowing all that, the war served to unite them, and gave them, as nothing else could have done, an opportunity of building again a great Arab state and taking their place among the lesser powers of the world. And still stronger than the acquisition of a great rich territory and the breaking of the old tribal barriers, in its influence upon their future and the part they are to play in the affairs of the Near East, was the

lesson they learned from the British in Western methods of war. Before their revolt in 1916 the tribes of Arabia and eastern Palestine were a people primitive in the extreme. They knew nothing of the industry and the civilisation of the outside world; their lives were less disciplined, and less complex, than the lives of the Israelite tribes in the wilderness. Their possessions were limited to horses, camels, tents, or squalid villages; their practice of agriculture in the fertile patches of their desert home was primitive. Their arms at the beginning of the war were long-barrelled, muzzle-loading, flint-lock rifles of antique pattern, and knives and daggers which were for show rather than use, since they disliked combat at close quarters. British policy poured tens of thousands of modern rifles into the country, and built up for Feisal a considerable, if somewhat miscellaneous, force of modern artillery, supplemented by a strong arm in machine-guns. After the armistice a foolish, short-sighted decision handed over to them a great number of additional guns and machine-guns captured from the Turks by the British. Throughout the campaign small-arms ammunition was flooded into the country, and, despite the noise-loving Arab's disposition to fire it into the air, a huge quantity of cartridges was hidden away for future use. The Arabs also acquired a large number of motor-cars, and many of them became expert in the handling of mechanical transport and in the ways of telegraph and telephone.

Before the rise of the Young Turks, the Government at Constantinople had dominated and held them with scattered light garrisons armed with modern weapons; and the Arabs, divided into antagonistic tribes, unarmed and penniless, and governed mainly by their own chiefs—who shared with the Turks in their exploitation—had neither the means nor the initiative to resist. At the close of the war they were loosely united; they had shared in the enjoyment of what was to them a miraculous shower of golden British wealth, and in the plunder of the fallen Turk; tribes had forgotten their old animosities as they followed the holy green standard of Mecca; they had acquired and mastered western weapons; they were rich in munitions. Successful in revolt, their narrow racial passion was inflamed, and they were in no

mood, after having, as they believed, overthrown the Turks by their valour almost unaided, to tolerate any alien Power in their land. This spirit burned from the Mediterranean to the mouth of the Euphrates, and augured ill for the Jews in Palestine, the French in Syria, and the British in Mesopotamia; further, it began at once to add fuel to the smouldering unrest in Egypt. Early in 1919 it became a common saying among the Nationalists in Cairo that, if the camel-drivers of the Hejaz were worthy of independence, so surely were they. England's alliance with Hussein was to have far-reaching effects upon British relations with subject Moslem peoples. Arab sovereignty, based upon Holy Mecca, was to England one of the most portentous developments of the war.

The armistice was followed at once by the Allied occupation of the Dardanelles and Constantinople, and sentiment prompted a decision that the Australians and New Zealanders should be represented in the force landed upon the Gallipoli Peninsula. Jaded as were the men from the two Dominions, and eager as they were to return home, all regiments bid for the honour of visiting sacred Anzac. The choice, which was dictated by the circumstances of the moment, fell upon the 7th Light Horse Regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Richardson, and the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel J. Findlay.² Embarking from Kantara at the end of November, the two regiments landed in the Narrows on December 5th, and went into billets in "a very dirty and verminous" Turkish hospital between Maidos and Kilid Bahr. The weather was extremely cold; but the Australians and New Zealanders, who were attached to the 28th British Division, soon made themselves comfortable, and the six weeks they spent upon Gallipoli was a season of deep interest to all ranks. All, or nearly all, the officers and many of the men had fought at Anzac, and they explored the old position with feelings of emotion stronger and deeper than any other battle-ground of the war could awaken in the hearts of Australians and New Zealanders. While there, they joined in the holy task of locating the graves of fallen Anzacs,

² Col. J. Findlay, C.B., D.S.O., V.D. Canterbury Mtd. Rifles. Farmer; of Ashburton, N.Z.; b North Taieri, N.Z., 11 March, 1869.

and in collecting trophies for the Australian national memorial collection. Parties of Australians under Lieutenant C. E. Hughes³ (Engineers) and Lieutenant W. H. James (of the 1st Light Horse Regiment) were officially charged with this work. The mounted men were treated with much consideration by the British Command, and nearly all the officers and some of the men were enabled to visit Constantinople. References in Richardson's report to the beaten Turks have a poignant interest. "The Turkish army on Gallipoli," he said, "is nearly all demobilised; only a few are being left here and there as caretakers, but large numbers of men in uniform, very shabby and ill-fed looking, wander about the villages. We used a number of these as sanitary men and scavengers." Writing of Constantinople, he said, "The attitude towards the British is friendly, even from the Turks, though most of the officers seem to feel their position very keenly. The Turkish soldiers are very ragged and shabby."

The Australians and New Zealanders in Gallipoli were shortly withdrawn. In their camps at Tripoli and on the Philistine plain the light horsemen waited, eager in the prospect of early return to Australia.⁴ But an unfortunate incident was destined to throw a shadow over the last days in Palestine of Anzac Mounted Division. Close to the camps of the three brigades in December was the native village of Surafend. All the Arabs of western Palestine were thieves by instinct, and those who dwelt close to the Jewish settlements were especially practised and daring. Throughout the campaign the British policy, as already noticed, was to treat these debased people west of the Jordan as devout Moslems, kin not only to the Arabs of the Hejaz but to the Mohammedans of India. And the Arabs, a crafty race, quick to discern British unwillingness to punish their misdeeds, exploited their licence to extreme limits.

They learned, also, that there was a disposition in the British Army to assume without justification that any looting and other similar offences practised by the troops against the natives had been committed by the Australians. Consequently,

³ Lt.-Col. C. E. Hughes, C.B.E.; 1st Fld. Sqdn., Engrs. Chief Adm'n. Officer, Imperial War Graves Commn., Eastern District, until 1936. Civil engineer and surveyor; of Deloraine, Tas.; b. Launceston, Tas., 6 Sept., 1890.

⁴ During this period a passing unhappiness was occasioned by the destruction of aged horses and the sale of the remainder to native and other local buyers.

if the Arabs missed a sheep from their flocks, they were emphatic that a soldier in a big hat had been seen prowling in the neighbourhood. Seldom punished, they became very impudent in their thefts from all British camps, and at times ventured to murder. All troops may have suffered equally; but, while the British endured the outrages without active resentment, the Australians and New Zealanders burned with indignation, and again and again asked for retaliation, but without obtaining redress. After the armistice a few men of Anzac Mounted Division were shot by the Arabs, and the resentment in Chaytor's division became dangerously bitter.

The natives of Surafend were notorious for their petty thieving. Prompted, perhaps, by the knowledge that the Anzac camps would soon pass for ever from their midst, and emboldened by the immunity they enjoyed, they grew audacious in their pilfering. They were reinforced, too, by a body of nomad Bedouins camped close to their village. The Australians and New Zealanders, sleeping soundly, were a simple prey to the cunning, barefooted robbers, and night after night men lost property from their tents. One night a New Zealander of the machine-gun squadron was disturbed by an Arab pulling at a bag which served him as a pillow. Springing up in his shirt, he chased the native through the camp and out on to the sand-hills, shouting to the picquets on the horselines as he ran. As he overtook the native, the man turned, shot him with a revolver through the body, and escaped. The New Zealander died as the picquets reached him. The camp was immediately aroused, and the New Zealanders, working with ominous deliberation, followed the footsteps of the Arab over the loose sand to Surafend. They then threw a strong cordon round the village and waited for morning, when the head men were summoned and ordered to surrender the murderer. The sheikhs were evasive, and pleaded ignorance. During the day the matter was taken up by the staff of the division, but at nightfall the demand of the men for justice was still unsatisfied.

Meanwhile they had resolutely maintained their guard about the village, and no Arab was allowed to leave. That which followed cannot be justified; but in fairness to the New Zealanders, who were the chief actors, and to the Australians

who gave them hearty support, the spirit of the men at that time must be considered. They were the pioneers and the leaders in a long campaign. Theirs had been the heaviest sacrifice. The three brigades of Anzac Mounted Division had been for almost three years comrades in arms, and rarely had a body of men been bound together by such ties of common heroic endeavour and affection. From the Canal onward men had again and again proudly thrown away their lives to save their wounded from the enemy. Not once in the long advance had a hard-pressed, isolated body ever signalled in vain for support. The war task was now completed and they, a band of sworn brothers tested in a hundred fights, were going home. To them the loss of a veteran comrade by foul murder, at the hands of a race they despised, was a crime which called for instant justice. They were in no mood for delay. In their movement against Surafend, therefore, they felt that, while wreaking vengeance on the Arabs, they would at the same time work off their old feeling against the bias of the disciplinary branch of General Headquarters, and its studied omission to punish Arabs for crime. They were angry and bitter beyond sound reasoning. All day the New Zealanders quietly organised for their work in Surafend, and early in the night marched out many hundreds strong and surrounded the village. In close support and full sympathy were large bodies of Australians. Good or bad, the cause of the New Zealanders was theirs. Entering the village, the New Zealanders grimly passed out all the women and children, and then, armed chiefly with heavy sticks, fell upon the men and at the same time fired the houses. Many Arabs were killed, few escaped without injury; the village was demolished. The flames from the wretched houses lit up the countryside, and Allenby and his staff could not fail to see the conflagration and hear the shouts of the troops and the cries of their victims.

The Anzacs, having finished with Surafend, raided and burned the neighbouring nomad camp, and then went quietly back to their lines. In the morning all the disciplinary machinery of the army was as active as hitherto it had been tardy. General Headquarters demanded the men who had led the attack and had been guilty of the killing. The Anzacs stood firm; not a single individual could definitely be charged.

Allenby wasted no time in expressing his mind to the division. The brigades were assembled on foot in hollow square, and the Commander-in-Chief addressed them in strong, and even, one might say, ill-considered language. He used terms which became his high position as little as the business at Surafend had been worthy of the great soldiers before him. The division fully expected strong disciplinary action for Surafend, and would have accepted it without resentment. But the independent manhood of the Anzacs could not accept personal abuse from the Commander-in-Chief. Allenby's outburst left the division sore but unpunished. The affair had unfortunate consequences.

A strained situation continued until about the middle of 1919, when, after the suppression of the revolt in Egypt, the embarkation of the colonial forces was resumed. The Australians of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and New Zealanders were on the eve of departure, yet the division had not been recognised by the Commander-in-Chief since the speech at Surafend. Allenby was then in control of the affairs of Egypt; he was visited by an Australian, who pointed out to him the unsatisfactory position which existed. He expressed surprise at hearing of the feeling engendered by his speech; the Surafend incident, he insisted, had deserved all that he said of it at the time; but it had not shaken, nor could anything shake, the deep admiration and even affection he felt for the Anzacs, nor could he adequately express his appreciation of their campaigning qualities and services. He issued at once a glowing and appreciative farewell order to the Australians, and at the same time wrote personally a tribute to their work in Palestine which is remarkable for its discernment of their distinctive qualities. This letter read as follows:—

“I knew the New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse well in the Boer War, and I was glad to meet some of my old friends of those days when the light horse came under my command just two years ago.

“When I took over command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in July, 1917, the light horse were already veterans, tried and proved in many a fight. Since then, they have shared in the campaigns which achieved the

destruction of the Turkish army and the conquest of Palestine and Syria, and throughout they have been in the thick of the fighting. I have found them eager in advance and staunch in defence. At Beersheba, a mounted charge by a light horse regiment, armed only with rifles, swept across the Turkish trenches and decided the day. Later, some of the regiments were armed with swords, which they used with great effect in the pursuit of last autumn.

"On foot, too, they have equally distinguished themselves as stubborn fighters. They have shown in dismounted action the dash and enterprise of the best type of light infantry.

"The Australian light horseman combines with a splendid physique a restless activity of mind. This mental quality renders him somewhat impatient of rigid and formal discipline, but it confers upon him the gift of adaptability, and this is the secret of much of his success mounted or on foot. In this dual rôle, on every variety of ground—mountain, plain, desert, swamp, or jungle—the Australian light horseman has proved himself equal to the best.

"He has earned the gratitude of the Empire and the admiration of the world."

There, between their great Commander-in-Chief and the Australians and New Zealanders, the painful Surafend affair rested. It was characteristic of the strong temper and of the frailties of both. Both had erred in anger. The sincerity of Allenby's final words to them was never doubted by the troops. Surafend, however, should not be forgotten. Without making excuses for the Anzacs, it may be said that the affair arose out of the simple fact that British regular officers entrusted with Australian commands in Egypt and Palestine, with a few notable exceptions, too often failed to grasp the vital fact that the narrow traditional methods of handling the soldiers of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales are not by any absolute law also the way to handle young men of the dominions. There is in the young British peoples oversea a genius, strong and distinctive, which must be considered in war as in peace.

From Tripoli, early in 1919, the Australian Mounted Division was brought by sea to Kantara for embarkation. The Anzac Mounted Division (less the 2nd Regiment at Jerusalem, and the 5th at Semakh) was still at Rafa. At this juncture there broke out in Egypt a rising which caused all regiments, except the 1st and 2nd, to be hurried to the affected area and detained until the trouble had been temporarily suppressed.⁵

The 1st and 2nd embarked for Australia on March 3rd. The 3rd Regiment followed in May. Before the end of the summer the whole of the Australian force from Palestine, with the exception of a few details, was clear of Egypt.

⁵ A more detailed account of the part taken by the Australians in quelling these riots is given in the *Appendix*.

APPENDIX.

THE EGYPTIAN REBELLION IN 1919.

Most of the light horse regiments before their campaigning was over were employed in the unhappy work of suppressing the rebellion in Egypt, which broke out early in 1919.

The story of that rising does not come within the scope of this volume. It had been carefully fostered by the malcontents, and demonstrations by Cairo students early in March were the signal for widespread rioting. Native civil servants at once contributed to the trouble by declaring a general strike; and the position of the British was made difficult by the suspension of most of the railway and telegraph services. Within a few days the outbreak had spread through all the lower provinces and extended to upper Egypt.

At that time the Anzac Mounted Division (less the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Regiments) was still at Rafa, but the Australian Mounted Division had been moved by sea from Tripoli to Moascar. All units had handed in their equipment, and were awaiting embarkation to Australia. No. 1 Australian Flying Squadron and the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Regiments had already sailed. There were no large forces of British troops in Egypt. As the efficient organisation and the ugly temper of the revolt were disclosed further embarkations for Australia were arrested; horses and equipment were rapidly assembled, and within twenty-four hours the 3rd Light Horse Brigade under Wilson was on the march across the desert for Zagazig. The whole-hearted response of the troopers was impressive; they abandoned without a murmur their dreams of Australia, and went out gaily on a new enterprise the probable duration and seriousness of which were uncertain. All the regiments of the two Dominions, with the exception of the 1st and 2nd, were soon in the saddle, and their zone of activity extended from Upper Egypt to the Delta. So urgent at the outset was the call for the mounted men that even the convalescents from the hospitals were enlisted. There was no actual organised fighting, but a few sharp decisive brushes with the rioters cost the Australians about twenty casualties. Seven of the twelve regiments, under the capable command of Wilson, were based on Zagazig, three on Damanhur, one at Cairo, and one in Upper Egypt (Minia), and other small columns were commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Foster and Lieutenant-Colonel Olden.

The Egyptians lost their nerve at the sight of the horsemen, and soon most of the leading spirits were in prison, while others at the firm bidding of the soldiers were strenuously mending the broken railways, and generally were as emphatic in their expression of loyalty as a few days before they had been turbulent in revolt. The Australians and New Zealanders formed the great part of the British force employed, and owing to their mobility, their reputation, and their decisiveness, they were undoubtedly the dominant factor in temporarily restoring tranquillity to Egypt.

Within a month all present danger had passed, but before embarkation the mounted troops, engaged in patrolling and other light work, comfortably billeted and with an abundance of fresh rations, passed several pleasant weeks beside the Nile.

REFERENCE TO CONVENTIONAL SIGNS

BRITISH

ENEMY

BLACK WHITE	COLOR RED	DESCRIPTION	COLOR BLUE	BLACK WHITE
		General Headquarters		
		Army		
		Corps		
		Divisional		
		Brigade		
		Heavy Artillery		
		Field		
		Cavalry - Column of Route		
		- In position		
		- Patrols		
		Infantry - Column of Route		
		- In position		
		- Patrols		
		Columns in disorderly retreat		
		Lines of retreat or advance		
		Armoured Cars		
		Motor Transport Columns		
		Horse		
		Camel		
		Aerodromes		
		Areas Bombed		
		Warships		

Railways - Main Lines
- Light
Roads fit for Wheeled Traffic
Tracks *Horses & Camels*
Telegraph or Telephone Lines

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